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Adventure

NOVEMBER

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H. H. KNIBBS

BEDFORD-JONES

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SEND ME $1 – I'll send your choice of these Special Selections for 10 DAY TRIAL on my MONEY BACK Guarantee . . . . .

I'll help you give fine gifts. Tell me what you want—put a dollar bill in an envelope with your name, address, occupation and a few other facts about yourself. I'll send your selection for approval and 10-day trial. If you are not satisfied that you have received good, honest value send it back and I'll promptly return your dollar. If satisfied pay in 10 small monthly payments.

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●

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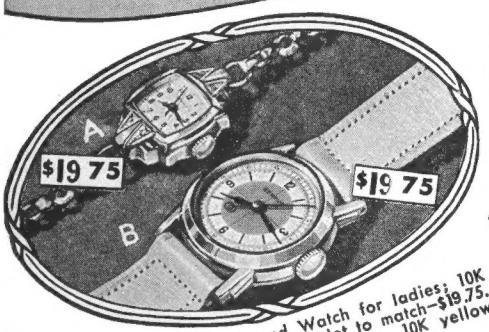

A-T566–Benrus Sweepsecond Watch for ladies; 10K yellow rolled gold plate; bracelet to match–$19.75.
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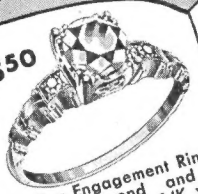

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A84/C75–Bridal Set; 8 diamonds; both rings 14K yellow gold.
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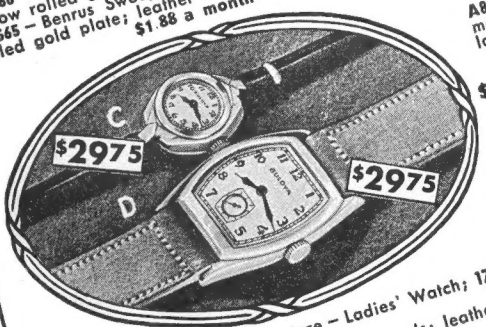

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D-M134–Bulova feature for men; 17 jewels; leather strap–$29.75.
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I154–Man's Initial Ring; diamond and 2 initials on Black Onyx; 10K yellow gold.
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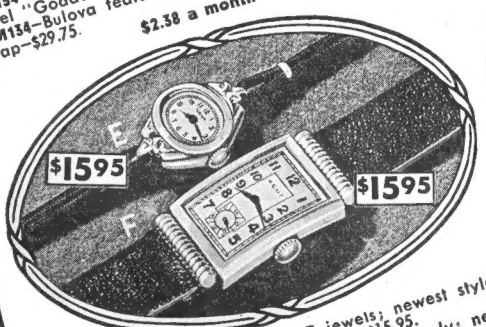

E-P159–Ladies' Kent Watch; 7 jewels; newest style 10K yellow rolled gold plate case–$15.95.
F-K190 – Man's Kent Watch; 7 jewels; sturdy, new style; 10 yellow rolled gold plate case–$15.95.
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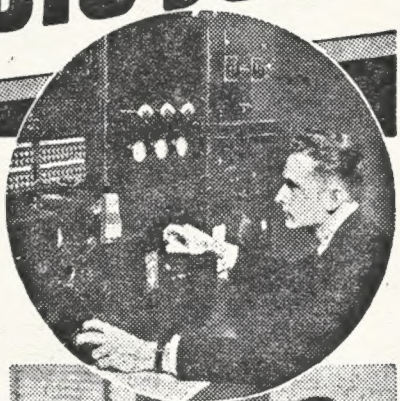

BROADCASTING STATIONS (top Illustration) employ Radio Technicians as operators, installation, maintenance men and in other fascinating, steady, well-paying technical jobs. FIXING RADIO SETS (lower illustration) pays many Radio Technicians $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 extra a week in spare time.

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Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

Before I completed your lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator. HOLLIS F. HAYES, 327 Madison St., Lapeer, Michigan.

Makes $50 to $60 a Week

I am making between $50 to $60 a week after all expenses are paid, and I am getting all the Radio work I can take care of, thanks to N. R. I. H. W. SPANGLER, 126½ S. Gay St., Knoxville, Tenn.

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I am now making from $10 to $25 a week in spare time while still holding my regular job as a machinist. I owe my sucess to N. R. I. WM. F. RUPP, 611 Green Street, Bridgeport, Pa.

Get my sample lesson Free. Examine it, read it—see how clear it is, how easy to understand. Find out how I train you at home in spare time to be a Radio Technician. Do it now. Mail the coupon.

Many Radio Technicians Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Radio Broadcasting stations employ operators, technicians, Radio manufacturers employ testers, inspectors, servicemen in good-pay jobs. Radio jobbers and dealers employ installation and servicemen. Many Radio Technicians open their own Radio sales and repair businesses and make $30, $40, $50 a week. Others hold their regular jobs and make $5 to $10 a week fixing Radios in spare time. Automobile, Police, Aviation, Commercial Radio; Loudspeaker systems, Electronic Devices are other fields offering opportunities for which N. R. I. gives the required knowledge of Radio. Television promises to open good jobs soon.

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The day you enroll I start sending Extra Money Job Sheets; start showing you how to do Radio repair jobs. Throughout your Course, I send plans and directions that have helped many make $5 to $10 a week in spare time while learning. I send you special Radio equipment to conduct experiments and build circuits. This 50-50 method of training makes learning at home interesting, fascinating, practical. YOU ALSO GET A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning, and equip you for full time work after you become a Radio Technician.

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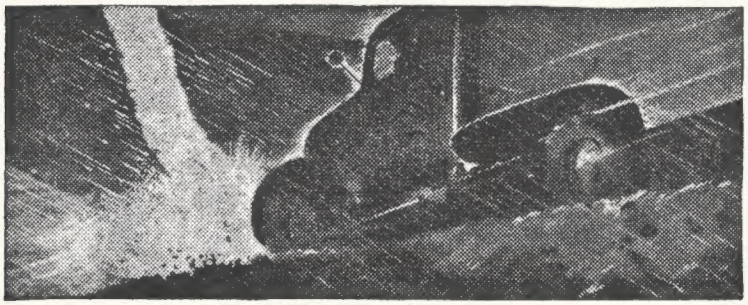
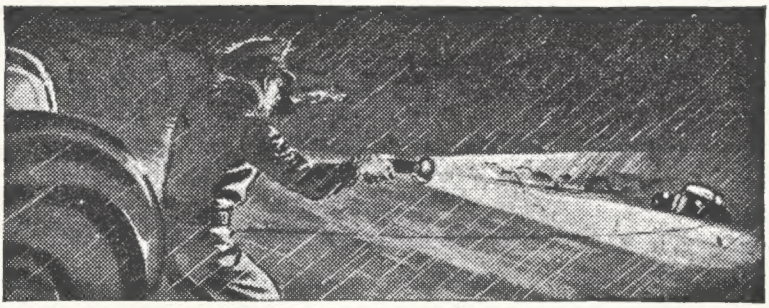


"THE RAIN WAS COMING DOWN in buckets as I took my heavy transport truck down a long hill," writes Mr. Fenimore. "Suddenly I thought the end of the world had come. Lightning had blasted the road a few feet ahead of my truck!

"THE BOLT BLINDED ME, but somehow I managed to bring that 10 ton truck to a stop. I groped in the darkness for my flashlight, then stood by the truck and flashed an appeal for help.



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(*Signed*) *John E Fenimore*

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DECEMBER ISSUE ON SALE NOVEMBER 8TH

Adventure

(Registered U. S. Patent Office)

Vol. 104, No. 1 for November, 1940 Best of New Stories

Boss of Blue Cañon (a novelette) . . . . HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS 8
Young Hardesty rides prisoner of the outlaws Chiselface, Apache, Bart and Decker, on the trail with "too many rocks—too many bends, each one of 'em a chance of getting a slug in the belly."

Smoke in the Hills (a novelette) . . . . JOHN MURRAY REYNOLDS 32
The Mohawks were loose with black paint and red hatchets. Calvin, woodsman, roused from an all-night drunk to a fight for life at a stockade.

Outlaw (2nd part of 4) . . . . . FRANK GRUBER 51
From the moment Jim Chapman, ex-guerrilla, said to the bankers, "Sorry, gentlemen, but this is a hold-up," the keenest hounds of the law took his trail, and his trail grew full of tricks.

A Porpoise With a Purpose . . . . . ALEC HUDSON 74
The torpedo ran wilder than a leaping goat, and with admirals and aides all about, the tin fish that knew nothing of stripes picked its own target.

Peace Waits at Marokee . . . . . H. BEDFORD-JONES 81
Between the Red Sea and the Nile, two enemy war planes crashed. The survivors crawled from flame and wreckage and learned the desert wasn't neutral.

The Soul of a Regiment . . . . . TALBOT MUNDY 92
The famous story of an author who has just died. Its fourth appearance in *Adventure.*

The Abatement of Old Man Jessup . . . FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE 100
There was hell to pay in Alaska's Cold Deck, because the old gold-hunter's dogs howled at the moon and he kept setting the town afire. But the mayor's name was Bull-Fiddle, and he wouldn't listen to a female named Terrible Tessie.

Barracuda . . . . . PEGGY VON DER GOLTZ 112
"Born mean, bone mean, eternally onery and game to the death—that's a barracuda."

The Camp-Fire . . . . . Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 117

Ask Adventure . . . . . Information you can't get elsewhere 121

The Trail Ahead . . . . . News of next month's issue 116

Lost Trails . . . . . Where old paths cross 4

Cover by Wesley Neff

Headings by Hamilton Greene, I. B. Hazelton, Lynn Bogue Hunt and Peter Kuhlhoff

Howard V. L. Bloomfield, Editor

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to Lost Trails will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and for women are declined, as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or for any other reason in the judgment of the editorial staff. No charge is made for publication of notices.

Wanted information of J. C. Johnson, born in Cairo, Ill., July 24, 1902; attended Elmwood School. Father was a steamboat man, Christian or Crispen Johnson. Write H. L. Beasley, mgr., The Hobby Shop, Centralia, Ill.

About eleven years ago I knew Ned Dixie in Belmont, Mass. Anyone having any knowledge of his whereabouts kindly contact Robert G. Lindsay, 133 Fenno St., Revere, Mass.

David Delauie, pronounced De-law-ya—was in Marines at Great Lakes in 1923-24; discharged in Quantico, Va.; worked as bridge riveter; was going to Utica, N. Y. when discharged. Would like to hear from him. L. A. Pratt, 3512 Lake Park Av., Chicago, Ill.

Clayton Isabel and Red Lewis, write me at once—Bill LaRue, Parrottsville, Tenn.

Would like to hear from Kenneth Sublette, Robert Livingston, Ben Covington, the Gorman Brothers, or anyone from Lytton Springs, 1914-15; also Fuzzy Bell, Carl McLain, Eldridge Metzger or anyone from George Jr. Republic, Chino, Cal. Also anyone from the 15th Regiment Guard Co. (aviation) 1920. "Soapy" Leonard was the company commander. Sheppard was the "C O". Jimmy Tarpley, 1530 Victory Blvd., Glendale, Cal.

I should like to contact any of the translators who served with me in the Bureau of Naval Intelligence (Cable Censorship) at 20 Broad St., New York City, during the first World War.—G. M. Patison, P. O. Box 128, Hollywood, Cal.

Have two brothers and two sisters, a mother past seventy-five, a dad of eighty-two. All interested in the attempt to contact a missing brother. Information wanted of George Verner Richards, born on farm in Monroe Co., Carleton, Mich., age 54, missing from Ann Arbor, Mich., since 1923. Was successful garage operator. May be in Canada, most likely in garage, or gas and oil business at this time. Was a reader of *Adventure*. Anyone knowing will please advise Vern's brother. Address Winn V. Richards, Old Moscow Tavern Antique Shop, Moscow, Mich.

In 1914, I located a long lost brother through "Lost Trails." Will you run the following for me?—Roscoe. I. Smith born in Nickerson, Kansas, March 12, 1889. Sometimes known as Art Smith or Frank Smith. Please write your brother Harry C. Smith, 3820 Flower St., Bell, Calif. My father is very old now and while we did find one brother through your magazine in 1914 and have stayed in touch ever since, the one lost sheep means more to my father than the others.

John Beardsley and Marion French, if alive, please communicate with 66 Wall St., Pontiac, Mich.; an old friend from Camp Columbia, Cuba, would like to hear from you. L. H. Harvey.

Louis Sequer, last heard from in Hericourt Hte, Saone, France. If any word notify Private Robert Owen, Company L—5th Infantry, Canal Zone.

Guy C. Pinney, Conneautville, Pa., R. D. 4, wants word of his son Roscoe Clarance Pinney, who left Sheridan, Wyo., in 1919 or 1920. He enlisted in the 81st Battalion Canadian Expeditionary Force, Sept. 1915, served in the First Brigade Co. F.A., France, discharged July 12, 1919. Five ft. 11 in. tall, fair, blue eyes, now 43 years old, left-handed. Last heard from in Santa Barbara, Calif.

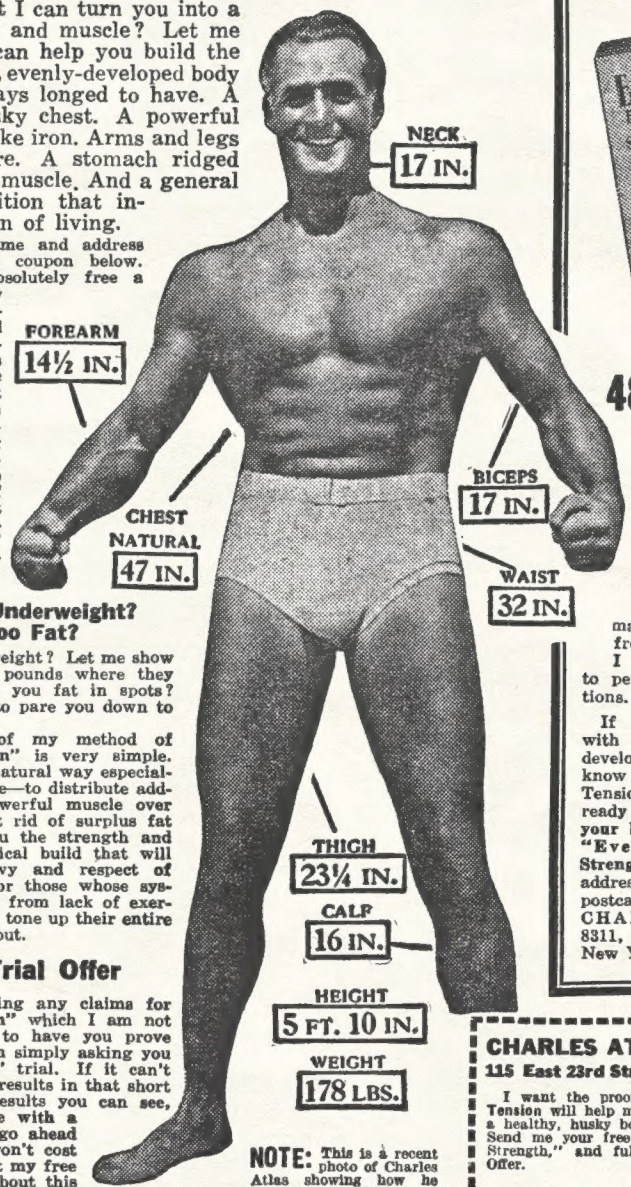
George Richardson, woolsorter—served apprenticeship at "Willey's" in England. Came to So. Barre, Mass., in 1924, returned to England, went to New Zealand, Tasmania and Australia. Last heard from him at South Melbourne, Victoria, March 2, 1931, was leaving within a week for Broken Hill, New South Wales. Word appreciated by Carle Fossett, P.O. Box 264, Barre, Mass.

(Continued on page 6)

"Give Me Your Measure and Let Me Prove I Can Make You a NEW MAN!"

WILL you give me a chance to prove that I can turn you into a man of might and muscle? Let me prove that I can help you build the kind of strong, evenly-developed body you have always longed to have. A big, deep, husky chest. A powerful back. Biceps like iron. Arms and legs that never tire. A stomach ridged with bands of muscle. And a general physical condition that increases the fun of living.

Write your name and address carefully on the coupon below. I'll send you absolutely free a copy of my new book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." It reveals the secrets of "Dynamic Tension" that changed me from a 97-pound flat-chested weakling into a husky fellow who twice won the title of "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" against all comers!



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7-Day Trial Offer

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NOTE: This is a recent photo of Charles Atlas showing how he looks today. This is not a studio picture but an actual untouched snapshot.

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CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 8311
115 East 23rd Street, New York, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of **Dynamic Tension** will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscle development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength," and full details of your 7-DAY Trial Offer.

Name .....
(Please print or write plainly)

Address .....

City ..... State.....

(Continued from page 4)

Anxious to hear from old shipmates that have served aboard the U.S.S. ROCHESTER, U.S.S. SCORPION, U.S.S. DENEBOLA, U.S.S. DOBBIN, ships of the Destroyer Divisions, and those who have seen service with the old U.S. Naval Detachment in European and Turkish waters. C. S. Williams, ex-Yeoman 2c, U.S.N., 240 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

Would like to hear from any descendants of John and Margaret Moore who left Tennessee about time of Civil War. Margaret was a Campbell before her marriage. She had three brothers, Philip, Alexander (called Sandy) and Daniel (called Short). J. T. Campbell, R. 2, Box 708, El Cajon, Calif.

De Witt L. Greene, born January 25th, 1888, in Illinois, son of W. J. Greene. Trying for 20 years to locate you. Write your sister, Georgia. Mrs. H. A. Wilson, R. 1, Box 68, Corcoran, California.

Would like to hear from R. E. Pullman & Anthony Cooper who were with me in California in 1919. William John Carson, 760 Pardella, Lemay, Mo.

Fourth annual convention and reunion of former sailors and marines of the U.S.S. Connecticut. Open to all who served at any time either as officers or enlisted men aboard the Connie.—Oct. 19, Philadelphia. Further information by writing Fayette N. Knight, Nat. Capt., Nat'l Assn. of U.S.S. Connecticut Vets., Box 487, Closter, New Jersey.

Wanted information of whereabouts of Alex Heida, last seen in Scottsbluff, Neb., in 1933 or 1934. L. F. Campbell, 107 West 7th Street, Muscatine, Iowa.

Will James E. Turner, formerly Sergeant 16th Co. C.A.D., Fort Mills, P.I., later (1918-19) at Vladivostok, Siberia, communicate with his old friends: 1: Johnnie Dawson, 1600 California, San Francisco, Cal.; 2: Deemus, 1915 Fox Hills Drive, Los Angeles, Cal.; 3: Minnie X.Y.Z., 10634 Wellworth Ave., W. Los Angeles, Cal.? Turner was honorably discharged from Letterman Hospital, June 10th, 1920.

Robt. V. Calkins, last heard of in the jungles of Venezuela, where he was employed in road construction work as a technician, and whose mailing address was, Mene Grande Oil Company, Apartado No. 45, Barcelona via Guanta, Estado Anzoatequi, Venezuela, South America. Important that I hear from him, or of him. Montgomery Brown, 240 S. Seminary St., Galesburg, Ill.

Marvin Arlington Harris, known to friends as Blackie or Sam Marvin, worked for Magnolia Petroleum Co., Dallas, Tex., from Oct. 1934, to Aug. 1935, as truck driver, worked for Joe D. Hughes, Inc., Houston, Texas, in December, 1938. He also has served in the army. Please notify his father, J. H. Harris, 316 East Gordon Drive, Decatur, Ala.

Wanted: Information concerning Charles Somcyock, veteran World War in the 4th Company located at Fort Slocum. From 1920 to 1926 was a bus driver, having his own bus. My dad sold his bus for him on our farm near Newburgh, N. Y. Samuel J. Matychak, 42 North Cedar Street, Beacon, N. Y.

My uncle, Benjamin Hutchinson, who sailed from Vancouver, B. C., on S. S. Zealandia, Christmas, 1912, for Sydney, N. S. W., Australia, last known address, 462 High Street, West Maitland, Australia. May have moved to Newcastle nearby. Height, 6 ft. 2 in.; eyes, gray; hair, sandy; age, about 68. Write his nephew, Valentine Barber, P. O. Box 183, White Plains, N. Y.

Joseph William Baldwin, last heard of in Detroit, Dec., 1920, reared in Rochester, N. Y.; age, 42. Information appreciated by his sister, Mrs. Clyde W. Cook, 54 Davis St., Bradford, McKean Co., Penna.

Jack Bailey, erstwhile adventurer and soldier of fortune, please communicate with your old partner from San Jose, Calif., Chet (Piute Kid) Moore, c/o Adventure Magazine.

I would like to contact any members of C.C.C. Co. 885, stationed at Chandler, Okla., and Gillette, Wyo. Leon Rainwater, 818-17 Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

Would like to get in touch with Albert McAuley who left Port Glasgow, Scotland, about 1923 for Canada. Bert Copley, 11741 Steel Ave., Detroit, Mich.

John Hall, formerly of Manning Ave., Toronto. Last heard of in Los Angeles. Have important news to communicate. Old friend would appreciate present address. Chas. A. Cronin, 622 Euclid Ave., Toronto, Ontario.

Lee Gordon—You wrote to me while I was in the East during 1927 to 1933. Where are you now? Frank Cruse—You painted in my studio while I lived back East, then left for the Army, about 1933 or '34. Write to me. Address Joseph M. Portal, Route 3, Box 552, Salem, Oregon.

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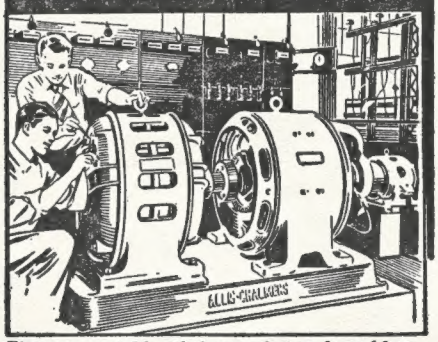
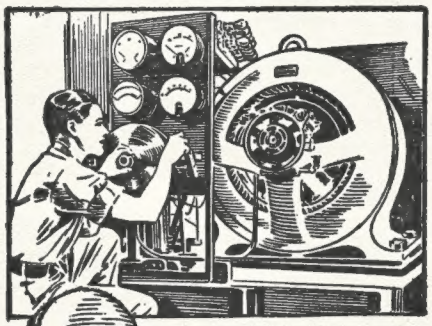
ARE YOU PREPARED

FOR NEW JOBS WHICH DEMAND SKILLED MEN?



First you are told and shown what to do and how to do it. Then you do it yourself.



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ADDRESS.....

CITY.....STATE.....

BOSS OF BLUE CANON

A NOVELETTE

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

"Too many rocks—too many bends. And each one of 'em a chance of getting a slug in the belly."

YOUNG Joe Hardesty's partner, Bedrock, had gone to Bowdry for a supply of powder and fuse. Work was at a standstill. Loafing always got on Joe's nerves. He puttered around for a while, then suddenly decided to fetch his pony down from the meadows and shoe him.

He had tacked on three cold shoes, was reaching for the fourth, when Shingles laid back his ears. The pony never kicked while being shod. Wondering what had occasioned Shingles' peculiar behavior, Joe straightened up and gazed round the mine flat.

Across from the mine tunnel, near the corner of the lean-to, stood a short, thick-shouldered stranger in battered stetson, faded jeans and a black cotton

shirt. Joe didn't like his looks a little bit, but he grinned amiably and said, "Mornin', mister. What can I do for you?"

"You're going to need that pony," said the thick-shouldered man. "So you can go right ahead and finish your job."

"Sure I can," said Joe, considerably surprised by this information. "But if you think you can run my blacksmithin', you got to do more than talk."

Joe was using a heavy carpenter's hammer for the shoeing job. It was swinging gently in his hand. The stranger

didn't look quick, yet his gun seemed to jump from the holster. "Heard tell you was a tough kid. But that don't get you anywhere with me. Get busy. And don't let that hammer slip."

A hard twenty years had taught Young Joe to step light and bend his neck when necessary. Right now it seemed necessary. He finished the job and let down the hoof. "Say, mister, what's the idea? I don't recollect ever having stepped on your face."

"Throw that saddle on your cayuse," said the intruder. "We'll be taking a little ride."

So that was it! Glancing at the gun in the stranger's hand, Joe swung the saddle up. "How about some grub? It's right near noon."

"Keep out of that shack!"

Young Joe's dark eyebrows rose in simulated surprise. "No spurs, no gun, and I'm goin' to take a little ride. Mebby you'll let me wear my britches."

"You can lead your horse, right now," said the man.

If Joe had got a leg over Shingles he would have risked trying for a getaway. But the stranger had blocked that. Obeying the stranger's gesture, Joe started ahead, leading the pony. The thick man wasn't after money. And it didn't look as if he had come to settle a grudge. Whoever he was, he wouldn't stand for a bluff. And joshing didn't get anywhere with him. But he would have to untie and mount his own horse. There was still a chance of getting away. Shingles was quick, and could dodge through the brush like a rabbit.

That plan also went glimmering down the draw when, deep in the brush, Joe saw a gaunt, pale-eyed man who evidently waited for them. He sat a rangy, flea-bitten gray and held the reins of a red roan. This man, Joe noted, had a hard, wasted face and a straight mouth. He did no talking.

Told to mount and head down the hillside, Joe did so without argument. His captors trailed close behind him.

At one time pretty thick with the outlaw Tonto Charley, Joe had made some enemies. But he had never before seen this rawhide with the bony face and his heavy-shouldered partner. He couldn't imagine what they wanted with him.

When they finally reached the desert flats and started south, the bony-faced man rode on Joe's left, which put his gun handy in case Joe tried to make a break. Already Joe had sized him up as the more dangerous of the two.

Riding slouched in the saddle, Joe's eyes were busy taking in the battered rigs, the filled cartridge belts, the brush-scarred rifle scabbards, and the weath-

ered clothes of his captors. There were no canteens on the saddles. That meant they would have to pull up at some water hole before the end of the day.

Sand and rock sparkled and glistened in the noon heat. In the east the giant spires of The Pinnacles towered against the sky. Round about lay hot, empty desert. Heading south, reflected Joe. Mebby on down to the border. What the hell!

AS the horse plodded toward the distant haze marking the southern horizon, a prairie dog popped out of its hole, saw the oncoming riders and was about to pop back in again, when the bony-faced man's hand flickered like a leaf in a breeze. A shot crashed out. The prairie dog buckled in the air and lay kicking on the sand. Without a change in his horse's steady gait, the bony-faced man had fired and holstered his gun in less than a second. Joe's scalp tingled. This gun man was just a little faster than anyone he had ever seen.

Grinning at Joe's surprise, the thick man said, "He does that regular, to keep his hand in."

"Keep his hand in what, mister?"

"His business," chuckled the thick man.

"Killin' prairie dogs?" Joe simulated disgust. "Hell, that little fella never had a chance. He wasn't packin' a gun."

"Heard you didn't scare easy," said the thick man.

The bony-faced man was gazing at Young Joe as they rode on. Joe grinned. "Me? Why say, I wouldn't be ridin' along with you ladies if I wasn't scared. What I mean—I ain't got no more chance than that there prairie dog."

Without hesitation the thick man drew his gun and presented it, butt first, to Young Joe. "Go ahead," he said, glancing meaningly at the bony faced man. "Let's see just how good you are."

Joe grinned and took the gun. But he didn't take the bait. "All right. Just forgettin' the invite for me to try and drop you, and get shot off my horse by your pardner before you hit the ground, I'll oblige."

Quite a distance ahead, another prairie dog, looking like a small brown stub, was sitting up on a mound. Joe swung the gun and fired. Sand sprayed up from the foot of the mound. He had missed. In the flash of the prairie dog's dive for the hole, the bony-faced man also fired. He didn't miss.

Joe had done his best. These men knew it. They also knew that he wasn't fool enough to start a fight just because he had had the chance. With a laugh, Joe returned the gun. They were sizing him up to see what they had to handle. What would be the next move?

Several miles distant a lone cottonwood marked the water-hole known as Burnt Spring. The country they were riding was criss-crossed by cattle trails. Yet there were no cattle in sight. A short distance east of the water hole lay the Embly ranch, fronting the Claybank road. The land grew barren in alkali flats as the road wound south. There was little chance of meeting anyone, unless, Joe reflected, some of Embly's cowhands happened to be in the vicinity of the spring.

When they finally came opposite the water hole, which, concealed by a sandy ridge, lay something like a hundred yards to the left, Joe's captors pulled up.

"Nobody in sight," said the thick man.

"I told Blaze," said the other, and hesitated. He sat his horse, gazing at the distant ridge of sand.

Hot, hungry, and irked by their hesitation, Joe said suddenly, "It's sufferin' hot, and my pony needs water."

The bony-faced man nodded to his partner. The thick man had a queer look in his eyes as he said, "I'll side you as far as the ridge, yonder."

Joe didn't like that. It looked too easy. But he had made his bluff. He hated to back down.

At the foot of the ridge, which concealed the spring itself, the thick man reined up. "Go ahead. Have one on me."

Puzzled by this attitude, Joe put his pony up the loose, heavy sand. Once he got the ridge between himself and the thick man he would ride like hell for Embly's. Shingles was too fat to hold top speed long. But he was good for a dash.

When Joe reached the crest of the

ridge and got a clear view of the spring, he changed his mind. Under the giant cottonwood stood four or five horses. They were saddled. Several men were loafing in the shade. Recollecting that Embly's cowhands got together about this time of year and pushed the cattle up into the hills to summer grazing, Joe felt a lot better. He would ride over and tell them just what had happened to him. They would do the rest.

One of the men under the cottonwood got to his feet. Joe saw the glint of a rifle barrel. The whang of a shot, and the whine of a slug past his head—and Joe whirled Shingles and took back down the ridge on the jump. At the foot of the ridge the thick man sat his horse, laughing at him.

Young Joe exploded. "Why, you dam', pot-bellied weazel! You didn't have guts enough to look for yourself."

Joe was still more bewildered when the thick man coolly rode to the crest of the ridge and waved his hat. From the spring came an answering halloo. The thick man turned in the saddle.

"Come on," he said beckoning to Joe. "If you're scared you can ride behind me."

Again Joe was tempted to make a dash for freedom—take it down along the foot of the ridge, and swing over toward Embly's. But it was a fool idea. The bony-faced man was sitting his horse, watching. With the whine of the slug still singing in his ears, Joe rode up the slope.

The men under the cottonwood got to their feet. Riding ahead, with reins on the horn, the thick man was curling a cigarette.

As they came into the shade of the cottonwood, a big man with a beefy, freckled face and red hair, stepped up. Glancing at Young Joe, he said, "I see you got the kid. Where's Decker?"

The thick man frowned. "Playing safe, as usual. I thought you agreed to have somebody on the ridge to show a hat when we come along?"

"Too dam' hot. We're all here, ain't we?"

"Go ahead and water your horse, kid," said the thick man. He rode back to the ridge and signalled to Decker.

AS Joe led Shingles to water, he glanced at the rifles stacked against the trunk of the cottonwood, handy in case of chance visitors. His gaze drifted from a swarthy, sharp-chinned man, to a tall, good-looking young fellow leaning against the trunk of the cottonwood. There was a smile on his lips. Beyond him, mending a saddle, sat a weazened little man, his dark, leathery face crisscrossed by wrinkles. He looked like a tough monkey. Joe had hoped to fall in with Embly's cowhands. He had guessed wrong—plenty wrong.

The red-headed man and the thick man were still talking together when Decker topped the ridge and rode into camp. As he dismounted, the young fellow leaning against the cottonwood stepped up to him.

"Deck," he said, "this outfit hasn't et since yesterday evening. Mebby you can live on wind. But me, I got to have meat."

"Chew on your saddle strings till we get organized," said Decker.

"If you think we ain't organized, just tell that to the rest of the bunch."

"Hell, Bart," said the thick man, "Deck and I ain't been to no hotel. And we ain't bellyaching about grub."

The hand of the weazened little man mending the saddle had begun to slide slowly toward his thigh, when the dark-faced man with the pointed chin spoke. "Bart's got the right idea, Deck. We're goin' to eat. We'd 'a' beefed one of Embly's yearlin's, only his outfit pushed all his stuff up into the hills. But it ain't so far to Embly's."

For a moment Decker stood looking at each man in turn as if waiting for further remarks. The weather was hot. But it was a chilly silence. Young Joe glanced longingly at the rifles leaning against the cottonwood. He hoped the young fellow they called Bart would start something. Bart was laughing. "You're so dam' thin, Deck, you couldn't hold a square meal."

The tension let down. Decker swung around, and took up the reins of his horse.

"Come on," he said, nodding to the thick man.

The weazened little man grabbed up his saddle. Rifles were shoved into scabbards. With slow, deliberate movements the men took up cinches and mounted. The thick man, whom they called Shunt, waited till sure that Joe wasn't up to any tricks.

They headed for Embly's ranch house. Joe didn't like that, especially as Embly's hands were up in the hills. Joe hoped Embly was with them. The old man was a pepper box. He was just as likely to tell this bunch to go to hell as he was to feed them.

Decker rode in the lead with the thick man, the red-headed giant, Blaze, close behind. The weazened little man and the man with the pointed chin followed. Bart swung in alongside Joe. Joe's eyes were on the weazened little man. In the saddle he looked more human.

"He's half Apache," said Bart, "if that's what's bothering you. The other half is snake."

"You boys must be a long way from your wagon," said Joe.

Bart laughed. "Left her bogged down in the Gila. What outfit do you ride for?"

"Mostly me."

Amusement showed in Bart's eyes. "I hear you're Old Bedrock's partner."

"I was, yesterday. But Decker kind of changed my mind."

"You figure Decker is boss?"

"I sure do."

"Well, you're wrong."

Joe's eyes were on the men up ahead as they approached the ranch gate. "That thick fella, Shunt, mebby?"

"Wrong again. And it ain't me, or Blaze, or Apache or Chiselface."

"Mebbe he's takin' a vacation," said Joe grinning. "Give him a name. I'm sweatin' to guess."

Taking a forty-five shell from his belt, Bart held it up between his thumb and forefinger. "Meet the boss."

"Oh," said Joe, "I ain't in such a hell of a hurry to meet him as all that."

UP ahead Shunt, Decker, and Blaze had stopped at the Embly ranch gate. Chiselface and Apache joined them. A lazy dust drifted back. Bart coughed, spat. Joe saw a bright red spot on the sand.

"Two bits more for the undertaker," said Bart. "Come on, Hardesty. Let's see how good Old Man Embly feeds his hands."

It was long past noon. There was no one in the ranchhouse yard. Embly's cowboys were busy in the hills, with one exception. He was lying in the bunkhouse with a broken leg.

The door was open. Flies buzzed in and out. Decker sent the weazened Apache back to the gate to watch the road. He told Bart to take a look in the bunkhouse.

Bart spurred his mount, slid to a stop in front of the bunkhouse doorway. "Hello the camp!" he called out cheerfully.

A thin, muffled voice answered. "I cain't come out. I got a busted laig. If you're lookin' for the Old Man, he's in the kitchen, takin' a sleep."

Decker dismounted, knocked on the ranchhouse door. From within came a snort and a shuffling. Bent, gray-haired, with a shrewd, pleasant face and keen blue eyes, Old Man Embly appeared in the doorway. He was in his stocking feet.

His expression changed as he recognized Young Joe.

"Hello, boys," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"Rustle some grub." Decker's tone was blunt.

Young Joe was surprised when Embly said heartily, "Sure! Step down and tie your horses. My cook is up in the hills. But I ain't forgot how."

The men dismounted, loafed in front of the house, but did not tie their horses. Bart squatted on his heels and made friends with Embly's dog which had snarled and bristled when the strangers rode into the yard.

"That fella," said Shunt, indicating Bart, "could make friends with a rattlesnake."

"Looks like he'd made friends with four or five of 'em already," said Young Joe.

Shunt gave Joe a hard look, but said nothing.

Down near the gate Apache sat his pony watching the road. Young Joe

started to walk toward the bunkhouse. Decker called him back.

"And me afoot!" said Joe, with a grin. "I reckon you're gettin' nervous."

A little later Bart managed to get Joe aside. "Don't get excited if Decker cusses you or talks rough. But if he smiles, watch where you put your feet."

"Thanks," said Joe. "But I ain't packin' a gun."

"That wouldn't make no difference to Decker."

Shunt and Decker, with the red-headed giant listening in, stood a few yards from the doorway, talking in low tones. Joe couldn't make out what they were up to. It was plain they were crooked, and killers. But just what line were they following? And what in tarnation did they want with him?

Joe was turning this over in his mind when Old Man Embly called from the kitchen, "She's stacked and ready. Come and get it!"

"Wait a minute," Bart whispered to Young Joe. "He rustled that grub too dam' quick."

Shunt, the red-headed man, and Chiselface shoved into the room. His foot on the doorstep, Decker motioned to Bart and Joe to follow them. Joe could see into the main room. The long table was empty, not a plate or cup on it. Just as Joe was about to step in, Old Man Embly appeared in the kitchen doorway, a cocked Winchester in his hands. His blue eyes were ablaze. "Thought you could run a whizzer on me, account of my boys being away," he said. "Feed you! Why—"

Blaze went for his gun. Embly's Winchester boomed. Blaze staggered and sank down. Joe saw Decker jump back from the doorway and run toward the end of the house. The rest of the men had their hands in the air.

"Now git!" snarled the old man.

Bart, just outside the doorway, was grinning at the men as they filed out. From behind Embly came the sound of a shot. A surprised look touched his eyes. He jerked straight. The Winchester slipped from his hands. Shot through the spine, he collapsed like wet paper.

As Joe stepped outside, he saw Decker standing near the kitchen window, reloading his gun. He was smiling thinly.

"You fixed him, all right," said Shunt, as Decker came up. "But he got Blaze."

"Blaze has been carrying his head too high for quite a spell," said Decker. "I'm runnin' this outfit."

Decker had sneaked to the kitchen window and had shot Old Man Embly in the back. Joe began to feel sick to his stomach. A red haze blinded him. "You're yellow, clean to your boots, you dirty, low-down—"

A thin smile touched Decker's mouth. Like a flash of lightning, Bart swung his gun and hit Joe over the head.

On his hands and knees, struggling dizzily to get up, Joe saw Decker jump for the doorway. From the bunk house across the way came the whang of a rifle. A slug splintered the edge of the framework as Decker disappeared into the house.

JOE made a dizzy run for a cottonwood, got behind it. Except for the horses the yard was empty. Bart was crouching behind another cottonwood near the bunk house. The cowboy with the broken leg had managed to drag himself to the doorway. He lay resting on his elbows, waiting a chance for another shot. From behind the cottonwood Bart could easily have got him. But Bart didn't fire.

For several seconds there was a dead silence. Then Embly's cowboy deliberately lined on one of the horses and dropped it in its tracks. It happened to be Decker's mount.

"Get him!" Decker shouted to Bart, "before he puts us all afoot."

"Go to hell!" Bart called back. "Get him yourself."

Edging along the row of cottonwoods, Shunt and Chiselface were trying to get a bead on the man in the bunkhouse, when the cowboy fired again. Another horse lay on the ground, kicking. Young Joe gasped. Embly's cowboy was sure set to put the gang afoot.

It was Shunt, crouching behind a cottonwood, who finally lined his sights on the cowboy. Young Joe started as the shot boomed. The muzzle of the cowboy's rifle sank down. Joe saw a shadowy

hand move on the bunkhouse floor. The hand faltered and became still.

"The lousy sons got him," said Bart as he came over to Young Joe.

"You bein' one of 'em." Joe was white, his eyes glaring. For a second or so it looked as if he was going to get a slug put through him.

The color left Bart's face. "I'd argue that if you had a gun on you." Turning, he strode down the yard.

Joe saw Decker come from the ranchhouse. Shunt and Chiselface came from behind the cottonwoods. The three stood looking down at the dead horses.

Joe walked over to the bunkhouse. The cowboy had been hit in the shoulder. The shot had angled through his chest, but he was still alive. He begged for water.

Joe was on his way to the house for a dipper when Decker stopped him.

"I'm after some water for that poor son-of-a-gun over yonder," Joe explained.

A glint showed in Decker's pale eyes. He started for the bunkhouse.

Shunt and Chiselface were stripping the saddles from the dead horses. Joe was edging up toward his own pony when he heard a blunt report. Shunt and Chiselface whirled round, their guns in their hands.

Decker came out of the bunkhouse, a smile on his lips. And Joe knew what had happened.

Apache came up from the gate. He glanced at the dead horses. He glanced at Decker.

"I guess you don't eat yet," he said.

Decker waved his hand. "Get inside and rustle some grub."

The lump on Young Joe's head burned and throbbed. But he had no grudge against Bart. If Bart hadn't knocked him down, sure as eggs Decker would have killed him. Joe regretted having flared up at Bart.

The weazened Apache was rattling iron in the kitchen. Shunt and Chiselface had taken their ropes and had gone over to the corral. Leaning against the trunk of a cottonwood, Decker was watching them. He turned and called to Bart who sat on the steps, smoking a cigarette. "You and the kid fetch Embly over to the bunkhouse."

"Can't you count 'em without laying 'em in a row?" said Bart.

"Fetch him over."

Bart shrugged, got up and came over to Joe.

"I got a job," he said. "Lend me a hand."

He seemed to have forgotten the recent flareup.

Joe helped him carry Embly's body over to the bunkhouse. Joe had not realized that the old man was so thin and frail. They laid him on a bunk, and Bart was covering the body with a blanket when Decker stepped in. The cowboy lay on the floor. He was dead. Decker had finished him.

Decker went across to the ranchhouse and came back with the old man's Winchester. He took hold of Embly's arm and jerked the body to the floor. Beside it he laid the rifle. Bart glanced at Joe and shrugged.

"Come on, Bart," said Decker. "Let's make it pretty."

Joe hung back. He was gazing at Shingles, who was standing near a cottonwood, dozing in the heat.

"You too," said Decker.

Looked like Decker wasn't missing any bets.

The old weight clock in the ranchhouse showed a quarter past three. Blaze lay on his back, his mouth open, his face black with flies. The flies rose in a swarm as Bart and Young Joe carried the dead giant out to the yard.

They were halfway to the bunkhouse when Decker told them to let the body down. Taking the dead man's gun, Decker fired three shots into the air. He dropped the gun beside the body.

Shunt and Chisel-face came from the corrals on the run.

"Who did the shooting?" Shunt asked.

"Grub is about ready," said Decker.

JOE didn't feel hungry. But he was mighty empty. He knew he had better eat if he wanted to keep up his nerve. Apache shuffled beans and pork upon the tin plates that the men held. They filed out and squatted under a cottonwood. Apache fetched the big coffee pot, and cups strung on a long cooking fork.

"Go ahead. Let's see how good you are!"

As he ate, Young Joe sifted Decker's scheme. Decker meant to make it appear that Blaze had killed Old Man Embly and the cowboy. The cowboy had been hit twice—wounded by Shunt and finally killed by Decker. There were now three empty shells in Blaze's gun. That would check up all right. Several empty rifle shells lay on the bunkhouse floor. It would look as if Embly and the cowboy had put up a good fight before Blaze killed them.

Joe drank his coffee, and concluded that Decker had gone to a lot of trouble for nothing. Anybody could see that the yard was all messed up with the prints of boot heels and horse tracks. Also there would be one of Embly's horses missing from the corrals. Of course one of the two dead horses could be figured as having been Blaze's mount. But how about the other? There was one dead horse too many. Any good marshal would figure that out.

It came to Joe suddenly that Decker, cold-blooded, and quicker than a snake with that gun of his, didn't have any brains. And that made him all the more dangerous. Bart, now, had some sense. And Shunt. About Apache and Chiseface, Joe didn't pretend to know much,

except that they took orders from Decker.

"I'm for pulling out right now," said Shunt, rising and tossing his plate down.

Decker told Apache to wash up the plates and cups and stack them where he had found them.

Chiselface, whose mount had been killed, was walking toward Blaze's horse when Decker stopped him.

"I'll ride that horse," said Decker, whose own mount lay in the yard, a bullet in its head. "Go get that cayuse you and Shunt roped out. He's stout enough to carry you," he added with a sneer. "You don't weigh much."

A glint showed in Chiselface's dark eyes. "Mebby not in meat. But I weigh enough to tell you that some day you're goin' to step just a mite too fast—and fall on your face."

Unobtrusively Shunt managed to get between Chiselface and Decker.

"Go get him," he said to Chiselface. "If you don't like Embly's brand, you can take my horse. I'll ride that dam' jughead of Embly's myself."

Joe let out a deep breath. Again a fight had been averted. Chiselface was on his way to the corrals. Shunt took the saddle off his own horse, waiting for Chiselface to fetch the Embly bronc. Bart had already mounted. Decker was about to throw his saddle on to Blaze's horse when Bart laughed.

"Dead horse," he said, gesturing toward Decker's flea-bitten gray, stretched out in the yard, "and no saddle on him. Something wrong with the tally."

"Shut up, Bart," said Shunt. "We're one hand short already."

"I'd admire to make it two," said Bart, smiling.

The weazened Apache grinned. "I take you on—anytime, Bart. Only your lungs get you first, I think."

"Deck is putting it on that he's gone deaf," laughed Bart. "He didn't hear me. But your ears are all right, Apache. So listen. I'll be rambling the country, spitting red, when you'll be stiff on your back, your mouth full of sand."

Sitting his pony, Joe was watching Decker. Was Bart crazy? Or was he handing out reckless invitations because his lungs were bad, and he knew he hadn't long to go anyway?

Chiselface came, leading the stolen horse, a chunky bay with a rough coat and white forefeet. Decker waited until Shunt had mounted before stepping up on Blaze's big brown horse. They moved on down to the ranch gate. Bart rode in the lead with Decker. Bart was talking and laughing. Apache and Chiselface rode together. Shunt dropped in beside Young Joe, who was thinking of the two dead horses in the yard and the two dead men in the bunkhouse. When Embly's hands got back from the hills they would do something about that.

Decker and the gang were a short distance ahead. Shunt made a cigarette and offered the sack to Young Joe. "How you feeling, kid?"

"Kind of sick from havin' to look at you fellas."

"Except Bart, mebby?"

"Bart's got a little white blood in him, anyhow," said Joe.

"Don't fool yourself, kid. Bart would drop you quicker'n hell if you tried to make a getaway."

"I ain't tryin'," said Joe.

THEY were riding across a flat, alkali-rimmed dry lake. Shunt, whom, Joe surmised, was trying to get at something, finally said, "That's what you say. But I've heard tell you wasn't so easy to hogtie."

"Show me a rope and I'll lay down and put up my feet, mister."

Shunt was silent for a while. Then he said casually, "Know the country west of Claybank?"

"There ain't no mineral over in that section," countered Joe.

"But you could find your way around over there, mebby?" suggested Shunt.

"Who are you fellas after, anyway?"

Shunt laughed. "You got me wrong. We ain't after nobody."

Taking advantage of the opportunity to loaf, their horses had dropped considerably behind Decker and the rest.

"I hear tell there's a short cut to the border down through the rough country west of Claybank," said Shunt.

Joe's ears came up. Short cut to the

border? Rough country? And all Decker and his gang had to do was to keep on riding south from right where they were and they would reach the border plenty easy.

Joe grabbed at an idea. If he was real careful he might do something with it. Easy, now! Let the idea have its head and travel its own gait.

"Me and Bedrock made it over in that country one time," he said reminiscently. "We was lookin' for mineral."

"Have any luck?"

"Luck? Mister, we dam' near cashed in. Got out of water. Figurin' it was too far to make it back to Claybank, we headed down a cañon, thinkin' mebby we might find a spring. We was just goin' to quit and turn back anyhow, when the old cañon spread out to as pretty a stretch of country as you ever seen. Good cow country. Plenty grass. And next thing we come onto one of them big Mexican ranches, regular old-time layout. What I mean—"

"And plenty water, I take it?"

"Water! Say!" Joe's voice was warm with enthusiastic recollection. He almost believed this yarn himself. "We took it easy, first off. Then we shoved our heads in up to our ears, just to feel it soakin' in."

They had reached the middle of the dry lake. Ahead plodded Decker and the others, trailing a thin cloud of dust. Dust made Bart cough. Maybe that was why he rode in the lead with Decker.

Shunt was gazing curiously at Young Joe. "What cañon did you say?" he asked casually.

As if awakening suddenly from a day dream, Joe said, "Oh, that! Never heard tell it had a name to it."

"But you could locate it, mebby?"

Joe played a hunch. "Easy. For because the walls was as blue as the hind end of one of them apes I seen in a circus once. The first two, three cañons west of Claybank is red rock."

"We're taking their dust," said Shunt, gesturing ahead.

As they moved forward to catch up with the others, Joe reasoned that Bedrock's reputation of having prospected more rough country in southern Arizona than anyone living might account for Shunt's questions about a short cut from Claybank to Old Mexico. But that was only a link in the chain. It wasn't, Joe reflected, the chief reason for Decker's interest in him.

Had Shunt swallowed the yarn about the blue cañon? Joe wasn't sure. There was a blue cañon over in that country. Bedrock and he had explored it. High-walled, harsh, and dry, the cañon boxed at its southern end, a considerable distance from the border. It was a trap. Bedrock and he had been forced to turn back, and were lucky in reaching Claybank before the water in their canteens gave out.

And now, Claybank itself lay directly ahead, a distant huddle of buildings in the shimmering heat waves. Hats, shoulders, eyebrows of the men were gray with alkali. Bart rode with a bandanna tied over the lower half of his face. Alkali water was slick and went down easy. But alkali dust burned and cut like a knife.

TOWARD sunset they reached the big arroyo on the outskirts of Claybank. Eyes rimmed with dust, lips gray-white and stiff, they dropped down into the arroyo and dismounted. Decker posted Chiselface on the rim as a lookout, and told Apache to ride into town, size things up, and not take on any liquor.

Bart was sitting on a rock, his head in his hands. He coughed frequently. Standing near Bart, his eye on Shunt and Decker, who had moved up the arroyo out of earshot, Joe said, "Decker puttin' out that pore, crippled-up cowboy in the bunkhouse back yonder kind of got me. Reckon I spoke a mite too quick."

"Go to hell!" groaned Bart.

"Sure! I just been figurin' out a short cut."

Bart sat up, his bloodshot eyes on Young Joe. "Well, you'll sure make it, if Decker sees you monkeying around that pony."

Joe shrugged. "Mebby I could 'a' kicked you in the face and got a leg over my cayuse. You was settin' handy for it. But anyhow, that wasn't my idea."

"You was just going to kiss your pony good night, eh?"

Joe grinned in spite of himself. Somehow, he couldn't hate Bart. Bart was feeling pretty tough, yet he could take time to josh.

"What I mean," said Joe, "I always pack some salt account of mebby havin' to bush out and kill a deer. Salt'll stop that bleedin'."

"God, if you got any give it to me!"

"Help yourself," said Joe. "If Decker was to see me monkeyin' with them saddle bags, like you said—"

The salt half strangled Bart but it stopped the hemorrhage. He grinned up at Joe.

"Hardesty," he said, "you're a damned fool."

"Only not so long in the legs as you, mebby?"

"But you're long enough to see over the top of a counter. Know what Decker wants you for?"

"You ain't tellin' me," said Joe. "It might spoil your game."

"You made one good guess. Here's another. If this outfit heads for Mexico, you won't get there."

"I had that figured already," said Joe. "Now if I had that gun you're packin'—"

"I believe you'd be fool enough to try it on, at that. Don't. Chiselface, up on the rim, yonder, or Shunt or Decker would get you, sure as hell. You're dam' near white, Hardesty. I'd kind of hate to see you spoiled."

Just before dusk settled, Apache returned. His pony was in a lather. Apache himself was drunk. Sullenly he faced Decker. "I don't see nothing. All good for the way we go."

Bart laughed. Apache swung around. Joe held his breath.

"You don' like what I say?" Apache's eyes made Joe think of a rattlesnake.

"You please me most to death," said Bart. "Go for your gun, if you feel real healthy."

Shunt interfered. "Plenty of time for that later. Back up, Bart. He's drunk."

"You think you stop me?" snarled Apache. "I take you on, too. Anytime. I take on all you damn—"

With a lithe, easy movement, Bart leaned forward and slapped the half-breed's face. Had he shot Apache down, Joe wouldn't have been surprised. But to play with a rattlesnake was asking for it.

Apache seemed paralyzed. He stood glaring at Bart as if unable to understand why Bart had struck him instead of going for his gun. Bart was smiling. "Sober up and I'll do business with you," he said.

"Let's all go eat." Shunt waved his hand. "How about it, Deck?"

Decker nodded.

Joe wondered whether Decker would have killed Bart or Apache, if a fight had started.

On the way to Claybank Shunt and Bart took the lead. The others followed, Decker riding in the rear alongside Young Joe. After a long silence Decker said suddenly, "I hear tell you're acquainted with Clem Arkwright."

Joe hesitated. He knew Arkwright. Bedrock and the banker, who had once been a big cattleman, were old friends.

"Met him a couple of times," Joe replied cautiously.

"In the cattle business, ain't he?"

"No. He runs the bank."

"I didn't know that," said Decker.

Joe grinned to himself. Decker had no brains. Just a skeleton packing a fast gun. If the gang knew about Embly's, and Bedrock, and the lay of the land, they certainly knew Arkwright's business. Decker was interested in Arkwright. That meant the bank—and a short cut to Mexico. That wasn't hard to figure. The big job was to get word to Arkwright before the gang got busy.

THEY entered Claybank like the shadows of early evening, slipping past the adobes on the edge of town, and into the alley back of The Chink's restaurant. Apache and Shunt stayed with the horses while Bart, Decker and Young Joe went in and ordered a meal. The Chink, who had weathered many hard years in Claybank, seemed nervously anxious to please these customers. He knew Young Joe well, but wisely made no sign of recognition.

The few local customers in the restaurant finally drifted out. Decker, Bart,

and Joe finished eating and returned to the alley. Apache, Shunt, and Chiseleface went into the restaurant.

Bart was pacing up and down the alley, biting his fingernails. He stopped in front of Decker.

"My cayuse," he told Decker, "is going to get a feed, and water. How about yours, Hardesty?"

"Same here."

"Likewise I'm for a couple of drinks," said Bart. "How about you, Hardesty?"

"Make it three," said Joe.

Decker's face was a dim, yellow mask in the starlight. Joe thought he saw a faint smile on his thin lips.

"In a hurry?" said Decker.

"No. But my horse is. Come on, Hardesty."

"He can wait." Decker shrugged his right shoulder. Bart's hand, on the bridle reins of his horse, began to slip slowly down. Joe was eyeing the carbine on Shunt's saddle, when Shunt himself came to the rear doorway, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"How about throwing a feed into the ponies?" he said, nodding toward the horses.

"We was just talkin' about that," said Decker.

Shunt, somehow, always seemed to be on the job when a fight was in the making. If Bart and Decker had tangled—Joe scowled in disgust. He felt that he wasn't getting any kind of a break. His luck was running loose somewhere. Every once in a while he saw a track, but it didn't seem to be going in the right direction.

"Throw 'em in Schofield's corral," said Shunt. "I'll be along when the boys finish their grub."

"And now," said Bart, after the night man had taken care of the horses, "I'm buying three drinks. Two for me and one for Hardesty. Coming along, Deck?"

"My drink can wait," said Decker, ignoring the insult.

Decker walked on down the alley as Bart and Young Joe entered the rear doorway of Randall's saloon. At this hour the room, with its long bar and overhead lights was all but empty. The broad-faced, black-haired bartender, his white-shirted elbows on the bar, was reading a newspaper. At a wall table sat a lean, sallow-faced man who glanced up sharply as Bart and Joe came in. His neat, dark clothing and well-kept hands advertised his trade. His name was Judd. He knew Young Joe, but, like the Chink, made no sign of recognition.

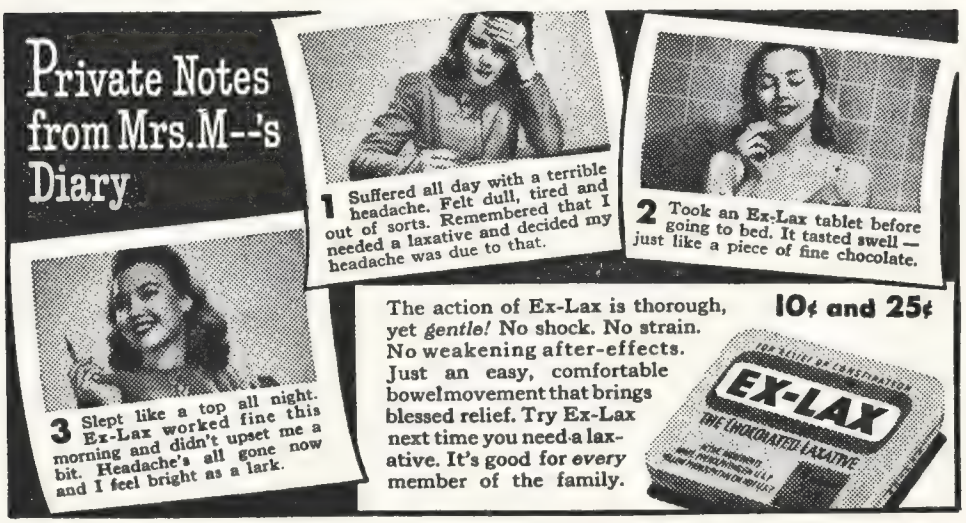
"Three glasses, and that bottle with the green label," Bart was saying.

"We aim to please," said the bartender as he delivered the order.

Bart and Joe drank one glass of whiskey each. Bart left the third untouched.

"Got any friends in town?" he asked Joe.

"A couple. Like to meet 'em?"


Private Notes from Mrs. M--'s Diary
1 Suffered all day with a terrible headache. Felt dull, tired and out of sorts. Remembered that I needed a laxative and decided my headache was due to that.
2 Took an Ex-Lax tablet before going to bed. It tasted swell — just like a piece of fine chocolate.
3 Slept like a top all night. Ex-Lax worked fine this morning and didn't upset me a bit. Headache's all gone now and I feel bright as a lark.
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"No. But mebby you would. It's a pretty evening for a walk."

Bart wasn't smiling now. But the friendly message in his eyes was plain to read.

Joe couldn't get to his horse. But he could walk out the front way, and up to the Chink's. He would borrow the Chink's gun, and then set out to get word to Arkwright that he'd better keep an eye on the bank.

Joe had started to leave when Bart seized his arm.

"Hold on! You stay right where you are!"

The sallow-faced man at the wall table glanced up. The bartender stopped polishing a glass. Joe's gaze swung from Bart to the front doorway. Decker stood on the threshold, sizing up the room.

"Your drink is waiting for you," said Bart as Decker joined them at the bar.

And to Joe's amazement Decker took it.

JOE bought a sack of tobacco and papers. Bart and Decker were drinking together like the best of friends.

"The kid had an idea he would take a walk," Bart was saying. "But I changed his mind."

Joe wondered if Bart were playing horse or if he really had meant what he said about taking a walk. Bart didn't seem to care what he did as long as he got some excitement out of it. Maybe he had known right along that Decker would come round to the front. And there was that extra glass of whiskey on the bar.

"We'll take that walk, Hardesty."

Decker had had two or three drinks. There was a faint tinge of color on his cheekbones as he turned to Young Joe. Out in the street Decker told Bart that after the horses had been fed he was to fetch them down to the east end of the alley and wait there for further instructions.

"Don't step sideways," said Decker as he and Young Joe walked up the street.

They walked up the north side of the street as far as The Chink's, and crossed over to the south side. Meanwhile Decker was silently observing the store fronts and sizing up each person they passed. Finally he said, "Know where Arkwright hangs out?"

"Home, mostly," said Joe promptly.

"Where's his house?"

Joe invented a home for the banker, who lived at the Stockmen's Hotel.

"Back yonder, a piece out of town. Row of cottonwoods in front. I can show you."

Joe was planning to get Decker as far out of town as possible and give him the slip.

Decker however, didn't seem interested. As they were passing the Stockmen's Hotel, a tall, heavy man talking with a much smaller man, turned and called out, "Hello Joe! Didn't know you were in town."

It was Clem Arkwright.

It seemed queer that Decker should be interested in locating Arkwright if he intended to rob the bank. Joe's thoughts were racing. The gang didn't have any giant powder. They couldn't chisel the safe open. Of course Arkwright had the combination of the safe. That was it! But apparently Decker didn't know that the big man was Arkwright.

Just then the banker's companion said, "I'll be over in about a week. Good night, Arkwright."

The cow was over the fence!

"I been away from the mine for a couple of days," said Joe in reply to Arkwright's question.

"Won't you boys come in and have a drink?"

"Not me," replied Decker. "The Stockmen's is too high life for a cowhand."

"That's right," said Joe, playing for time.

Arkwright laughed. "Then we'll cross over to Randall's. Joe's going to take a drink with me if I have to set on him and pour it into him."

They were halfway across the street, Joe torturing his mind for a way to warn the banker, when Decker whipped out his six-shooter and stuck it in Arkwright's ribs. "Keep right on down the street, Mr. Arkwright."

"Joe!" The banker's voice was sharp with surprise. "You boys are carrying

your joke a little too far, seems to me."

"You step ahead likewise," Decker ordered Joe. "If you fellas want it funny, just try to make a break."

That dead, level tone meant business. Arkwright glanced right and left. There was no one in sight. Beyond Randall's saloon, and the Stockmen's Hotel, opposite, the street was dark. Arkwright was too level-headed to get himself killed for the mere sake of a glowing obituary in the newspaper.

"I'm taking it for granted you're heading for the bank," he said, as Decker herded them down the street.

"You're right, so far," Decker replied.

"But you got me wrong," stated Joe. "These fellas—"

Decker told Young Joe to keep his mouth shut. But Joe had managed to warn Clem Arkwright there were others connected with the holdup.

They passed the harness shop, the general store and post office. Joe, Arkwright reflected, was being used as a decoy. Puzzled as to how Joe had got tangled up in this mess, and in no way discounting the seriousness of the situation, Arkwright mechanically obeyed Decker's instructions. Meanwhile the banker was wondering how he could prevent the robbery.

THE bank, a one story brick building, stood on the northeast corner of the street. Back of it ran the alley. Chiselface was in the alley, holding the horses. Shunt, followed by Bart, came from the opposite corner as Decker showed up.

It looked, thought Joe, like a perfect holdup, if something didn't slip. Arkwright might refuse to open the safe. If Decker killed him they couldn't get the safe open. They had no giant powder to blow it. Would Arkwright put up a bluff? Or would he open the safe and buy his life at a long price?

Decker told Apache to watch the street; turning to Arkwright, he ordered him to unlock the front door.

"Certainly!" said Arkwright.

Bart laughed. The banker took a bunch of keys from his pocket, unlocked the door. He was about to step in when Decker stopped him. "Bart, you push ahead and find a light. Make it fast."

Somehow Joe felt guilty of having got Clem Arkwright into this mess. And old Clem was taking it like a warrior—wasn't scared a little bit. And wasn't fooled any, either. Probably he was figuring, right now, how he could turn the cards on the gang.

When Bart turned on the light above the big, old-fashioned safe, Shunt came forward with a gunny sack. "Watch 'em, Deck," he said. "Bart and me'll take care of the roll."

"Help yourself, boys." Arkwright gestured toward the locked safe.

The nickel-plated handle and the dial on the big safe shimmered in the soft light. Standing straight and tall, Arkwright made no move to open it. Joe was in a cold sweat. He knew what Decker's grin meant. Bart leaned over and toyed with the combination. Shunt paid tribute to Arkwright's nerve. "Don't blame you any for laying your ears back, Arkwright. But we ain't got all night."

"Hey!" Joe called out. "Don't shoot —it's me!"

"I don't carry the combination with me," said the banker.

"Open that safe or I'll blow your guts out!" snarled Decker.

"You would. And what would you get out of it?"

Shunt said, "You better open up, Mr. Arkwright. I figure you got too much sense to get killed."

"Any objections to my smoking a cigar while you boys clean me out?" asked the banker.

"Go ahead and light up," said Shunt, "seeing you ain't got a gun on you."

The ex-cattleman took a cigar from his vest pocket and bit the end off. "Just how do you know that?"

"Because there ain't no smoke in here, yet."

Arkwright smiled and lighted his cigar. "I'll take orders from you," he told Shunt. To Bart, who was still toying with the combination, the banker said, "Try this. Start at ought. Then right to eleven. Back to ought. Right again to twenty. Then back left to thirty-five. Got it?"

Bart's hand moved slowly. Everyone was watching him. Arkwright puffed at his cigar, his eyes half closed. Bart turned the handle. A soft click, and the safe door swung open.

NEATLY stacked gold and packets of bills showed in the soft light. Bart began to load up the sack Shunt held. To Joe's surprise Arkwright seemed entirely serene. And that didn't seem human.

In the space next to the tall ledgers was a heavy gold watch, a gun in a weathered holster, and, strangely enough, a pair of silver mounted spurs.

"These yours?" asked Shunt.

Arkwright nodded.

"Throw 'em in the sack," ordered Decker.

"I figure I've treated you boys pretty well," said Arkwright. "You might leave me my watch and spurs and gun. They mean old times to me. They ain't worth a whole lot to anybody else."

"Hell!" said Bart, shoving the three articles back into the safe, "no sense hogging it."

With the silver added to the plunder, the sack was heavy. As he rose with it, Shunt bumped into Young Joe. Joe backed out of the way. He felt something poke him in the ribs. It was the stove lifter sticking up from a lid in the big, box-shaped wood stove.

"Step ahead," said Decker gesturing with his gun.

Joe knew then that Decker intended to shoot Arkwright down when he turned his back. And Bart knew it, and Shunt. Naturally, if Decker turned the banker loose he would organize a posse and get after them. But he had been game, and had taken a beating without a whimper.

"Just a minute, Deck," said Shunt. "Bart can get a rope and we'll hogtie him. It'll be long past daylight before anybody finds him."

"To hell with a rope. I'll fix that," said Decker.

Joe slid his hand behind his back and took a grip on the stove lifter. With teeth clenched, and heart pounding, he hurled it through the air. The light above the safe went out with a plop. Young Joe dropped and crawled behind the big stove.

There was a scurry and scuffling. A desk stool crashed to the floor. Something struck the wall with a loud, metallic whang. It was the cuspidor which Arkwright had hurled in the general direction of the thieves. A shot flashed, and a slug pinged off the top of the stove, as Shunt, Bart, and Decker made for the front door. From the vicinity of the safe came a shot in reply. Someone up front stumbled and cursed.

Joe didn't know just who was who, at the moment, so he kept silent. Had they got Arkwright in the mixup? And who had fired that last shot?

The room became still, too still for comfort. Joe could hear the wall clock ticking placidly. His ear itched. He heard a movement near the safe. Then came the sound of someone walking cautiously toward the front of the bank. A tall, heavy figure showed against the faint starlight filtering through the street windows.

"Hi!" Joe called out. "That you, Clem?"

His bulk concealed by the offset of the entrance, Arkwright brought his gun

down and fired. A short, dim figure on the corner across the street doubled up and falling forward, began to crawl toward the alley back of the bank. There was a rush and a pounding of hoofs as the gang headed for the west end of town.

"Hey!" Joe called out as Arkwright came in and started toward the back of the room. "Don't shoot! It's me."

Clem Arkwright turned on a light and surveyed the wreckage. There was a glint in his eye; his mouth was a straight line. Joe rose from behind the stove.

"Reckon they had you by the seat of your pants and your neckband," said Arkwright.

"That was how."

AS Arkwright and Joe stepped out to the sidewalk a man came running across the street. It was the town marshal.

"Heard a ruckus," he panted. He glanced suspiciously at Young Joe, whom he had seen in the Chink's with two strangers. "Did somebody break in?" he asked, nodded toward the open door of the bank.

"Not exactly," replied Arkwright. "I just made a short time loan. I'm going to collect before it becomes overdue."

"Hell!"

"Meet you at the livery," said Arkwright. "Come on, Joe."

The banker stopped at the Stockmen's Hotel to get his rifle. He crossed to Randall's saloon and talked with the sallow-faced gambler, Judd. As Joe accompanied Arkwright to the livery he recounted his experiences with Decker and the gang. When the banker learned about the killing of Old Man Embly, he said in a quiet tone, "The interest on that loan is going to come high."

"And you want to collect quick," said Joe. "Them fellas is killers, every dam' one of 'em."

The town marshal arrived at the livery with two hard-looking companions. They all carried Winchesters. He seemed to have cooled considerably. He wondered if it would be worth while trying to trail the gang at night.

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"If you get 'em it will be worth your trouble," stated Arkwright. "Chances are, they are headed for Mexico."

"I'm taking the south road," said the marshal. He and his companions left hurriedly, without asking Arkwright what he intended to do. In spite of the gravity of the situation, the banker seemed amused. "Now that we have got rid of those four-flushers, we'll get down to business," he told Joe.

Arkwright used the telephone. A few minutes later, a lean little man with leather brown skin and white hair came into the livery. He had an old Sharps' buffalo gun cuddled in his arm. He wore high-legged Apache moccasins. He nodded to Arkwright. He asked no questions. His name was Lute Parsons.

"The bunch left one of their horses in the corral," stated the night man. "Little bay horse with a hay belly."

"That'll be Shingles," said Joe, "I'll go fetch him."

Meanwhile the card man, Judd, arrived. He was dressed in his usual clothes, except that he had tucked his pant legs into his high-heeled, polished boots. He carried no rifle. But Joe knew that a mighty fast gun nested in his shoulder holster.

"Lose your friends?" he asked Joe.

"No," said Joe, grinning. "They lost me."

On his way to the corral to get Shingles, Joe stumbled over a man lying in the alley. The man's legs were drawn up as if he were in pain. Drunk, probably. Joe stopped. Then he shouted, "Hi! Fetch a lantern."

It was the body of Apache. He had been watching the street when Arkwright fired from the bank doorway. Evidently he had tried to crawl down the alley to the corral to get his horse.

"What's his name?" said Arkwright.

"Apache."

"Good Indian. Let's get going."

Arkwright, Joe knew, had fired but one shot. Apache was hit twice. His horse was gone. But there was no mystery about it. Undoubtedly Decker had killed Apache. A dead man couldn't talk. And there would be one less to share in the loot.

Just beyond the western outskirts of Claybank, the road ended in a reach of starlit sand and brush spreading to the low hills which rose gradually to rock ridges in tumbled masses—a country slashed with ragged barrancas, and in the higher regions, with deep, rock-walled cañons. Arkwright and Lute Parsons knew the country in a general way, but they banked on Young Joe to locate the blue cañon which he had described to Shunt. That would be when daylight came. Just now it was a case of slowly drilling west, on the chance that Decker and his gang had actually headed into the rough country on the strength of Joe's story.

Joe was wondering if he hadn't made a mistake in steering the posse into this dry, forsaken country. Shunt's inquiry might have been merely a blind. Maybe the gang had taken the south road to the border. It was smooth going, and they could travel fast. Wherever they were, it was a sure bet they wouldn't give up without a fight.

Dismounting, Lute Parsons struck a match.

"Looks like Joe's got it right, so far," he said. "Tracks of five horses, heading west. Fresh tracks. One of 'em might be a led horse."

"As I recollect," said Joe, "it's only two, three hours from here to the wide end of that blue cañon. At night they wouldn't be able to tell it from a red shirt. They ain't goin' to ride into the first cut they come to, figurin' it'll take 'em to the line. Chances are they'll wait till daylight to locate the blue cañon."

"Chances are," said Judd in a dry tone, "we better step down and stay right here till the light breaks. I'm not so keen about running into a flash in the dark."

They dismounted in the notch in the hills, where Lute Parsons had discovered the tracks. With his old buffalo gun across his arm, Parsons drifted away like a shadow, making no sound as he disappeared in the darkness.

Arkwright and Judd were sitting with their backs against a rock, making the most of their enforced wait for daylight. Joe had curled down, hoping to catch up on his sleep, when Arkwright asked him for more details about the country they were going into, and the outlaws.

Joe sat up, grumbling. "Shunt's got some brains. You seen him, and heard him talk. Decker ain't got no brains. He don't know nothin' but kill. Bart, that was monkeying with the safe, is the only white man in the bunch. What I'm sayin', he ain't mean. But don't you figure he ain't a killer. Apache is a dead snake. I don't know nothin' about the man they call Chiselface. Now you fellas can go to hell and change your shirt. I'm takin' a sleep."

"Nice boy—when he's asleep," said Judd.

"Mebby if you get three, four buttonholes in that long-tailed coat where there ain't no buttons to match," growled Joe. "you'll be a nice boy, likewise."

Judd laughed silently. He wasn't discounting the risk they ran. He was simply having fun with Young Joe. Plenty of time to mourn when the corpse was in the long box.

COLD and gray, the thin edge of dawn showed in the east. In the dim light old Lute Parsons was coming round the shoulder of the notch leading a horse. It was a rough-coated bronc. It bore Embly's brand.

"Where's the passenger?" said Joe. stretching and getting up.

"He wasn't aboard. So I reckon he's afoot."

Old Lute took a chew of tobacco and mumbled it around until he got it comfortably settled. "The country drops off right sharp the other side of the hill. I was poking along down the easiest way I could find, when I thought I seen something move. So I located me a rock and gets behind her. When I got the scenery all sorted out to suit, I bellied along till I come onto this here cayuse tied to a dead stub."

"Tied, eh? That's queer."

Lute shifted his chew. He offered no further information.

"Spit it out," said Arkwright.

There was a suspicion of a twinkle in Lute's deep-set eyes.

"It's just got soaked up good." He squatted down and laid his old buffalo gun beside him. "Clem, this here cayuse was tied near the mouth of a cañon. I figure he was left there for a decoy. If them fellas had turned him loose, chances are he would back track, and give 'em away. If they kept on leadin' him he would hinder their moving fast."

"You think they're onto it that we're after 'em?"

"Hell, I dunno."

Lute Parsons stripped saddle and bridle off the Embly bronc and turned him loose. Canteens were examined. They were going to waterless country, a dangerous setup.

Joe took the lead. Arkwright and Judd followed, with Lute Parsons bringing up the rear. Joe could feel the bite of the sun on his back as they rode through the notch and started down the long, boulder-strewn slope of a shallow valley. Below, in the far distance, the shadowy mouth of the first cañon looked like the red, ragged jaws of some prehistoric monster. Joe got his bearings. There was, he knew, another cañon farther west, red-walled and deep. Still farther along, perhaps an hour's ride, was the blue cañon.

The ground grew so rocky the tracks were lost. When they arrived at the slope west of the blue cañon, Lute called a halt. In a small, flat sand pocket among the rocks was a V-shaped indentation surrounded by a dim oval of a horse shoe.

The sun had begun to do business. Judd's sallow face was beaded with sweat. Arkwright pushed back his hat and mopped his forehead. Joe told himself it would be plenty hot about noon. But that was several hours away. Meanwhile his job was to recall the landmarks that Bedrock and he had noted when prospecting the country. Each man in the posse was alert for a surprise. In that jumble of rocks and ridges and scattered brush it would be mighty easy to run into an ambush.

Joe told himself he didn't like the job a little bit. Of course, if the posse had luck, and Decker and Shunt and Chiselface were cut down, he wouldn't feel too bad about it. But Bart—Joe hoped that Bart would manage to make his getaway. A fool idea. If it came to a mixup, Bart would be up in front pumping slugs as fast as he could turn them loose.

Unconsciously, Joe's hand dropped to

the butt of the Winchester under his leg. The metal was hot.

Close behind him, old Lute stopped. "See any war bonnets?"

Joe shook his head.

Still keeping to high ground, they passed the distant mouth of the second cañon. From there on, Joe quit speculating on the possibilities and gave his entire attention to the immediate job.

The tracks they had already seen showed that Decker and his gang had moved along mighty slow, feeling their way, probably under Shunt's directions, for Joe had told him that there were several cañons leading south, but only the one with blue rock walls that ran clear through to Mexico.

"She's just a piece beyond that ridge yonder." He pointed toward an upheaval of rock against the western skyline.

Awkwright nodded. Lute Parsons was gazing at the ridge. Judd, who had tied his coat back of the saddle, sat his horse, smoking a cigar. He tossed the cigar away.

When they finally came to the foot of the ridge, old Lute dismounted and climbing the rocky slope till he was near the top, lay down and began to crawl forward.

Tensely, Arkwright, Judd and Young Joe watched him. Rock and gravel glistened and shimmered in the hot white light. Lute wormed his way between boulder and boulder and across the final bare stretch of the crest.

FOR several minutes Parsons lay peering over the top of the crest. Presently he reached for his rifle, which lay beside him, hesitated, and finally began backing down on hands and knees.

"I don't like it," said Arkwright.

Lute had spotted something below the other side of the ridge. Joe knew that Decker and his gang had had plenty of daylight in which to locate the blue cañon. Had they caught on to it, somehow, that they were being followed, and had they decided to hole up among the rocks and make a fight of it?

Lute Parsons was on his feet now, coming back. Joe noticed that he toed in, like an Indian. Lute showed no excitement, simply took a fresh chew and told them that near the mouth of the blue cañon a buckskin horse was standing in the shadow of a big rock, the reins down.

"Apache rode the only buckskin in the outfit," said Joe. "And Apache's dead."

Arkwright frowned. "They dropped one horse at the first cañon. Now they drop another."

"One man afoot," suggested Judd.

His deep set eyes shifting from side to side as he surveyed the surrounding country, Lute Parsons finally said, "Not knowing this section any too good, them fellas had to kind of pick a trail, coming west, and it was dark. We come along right smart, considering. Mebby they ain't so far ahead of us as we think."

Joe decided to do a little careful looking around himself. It was plain hell sitting still in that heat. "I'm goin' to take it north around that hill yonder and come at the blue cañon from the west," he told Arkwright. "Mebby I'll see somethin'."

"Come on," said Judd. "I'd like a little action for my money."

Agreeing to signal in case they spotted anything, Joe and the card man set out. Lute Parsons suggested that he and Arkwright post themselves near the top of the ridge and keep an eye on the cañon.

Rounding the big hill took longer than Joe had anticipated. When, however, Judd and he finally reached a point where they could again see the mouth of the cañon, Joe forgot all about the recent rough going.

"See anything funny down near that big rock?" he asked Judd.

"Buckskin pony. He looks played out."

"I mean on the west side of the rock. You're lookin' at the north side."

Judd's eyes narrowed. At the foot of the rock, a man was lying face down. The sun burned on his black cotton shirt, his bare head. His hat was some distance away. For several minutes Joe and the card man watched the motionless figure.

"Ain't natural," said Joe. "Nobody could sleep with the sun bitin' into him

like that. Maybe one less to fight."

Although their position afforded them a clear view of the country below, they took their careful time. When within thirty or forty feet of the motionless figure, Joe flung a small chunk of tufa. It struck the big rock and, bounding back, fell on the man. He didn't move.

Cautiously Joe approached the big rock. He turned the man over. It was Chiselface. There were three holes in his chest, close together. His six shooter carried the customary five loads. Meanwhile Judd caught up the buckskin. The magazine of Chiselface's carbine was filled and there was a load in the chamber.

Judd and Young Joe looked at each other.

"Somebody got him close up, and sudden," said the card man.

Joe was about to signal to Arkwright when he and Lute Parsons appeared coming down the slope.

"Which one of 'em is it?" asked Arkwright, gazing down at the dead man.

"They call him Chiselface."

Arkwright glanced at the buckskin pony. There was nothing tied on the saddle, not even a coat.

Padding slowly across the mouth of the cañon, Lute Parsons finally signalled to Arkwright. On a low, rounded rock was a whitish gray scar where a horse's hoof had scored it. There were no other tracks visible.

"Keep your eye on the cañon," said Parsons, "while I look around a spell."

The old government scout knelt and sighted across the ancient river bed, got up and began to back track toward the big rock.

"Plain as a flour-sack patch on a pair of britches," he declared as he came back. "The fella that beefed him was a short piece south of him, down the cañon. When he commenced shooting, the fella on the buckskin whirled his horse and made for the big rock, yonder. It was done so dam' quick he didn't bleed much till he fell off his horse."

"Then you'd say the rest of 'em took down the cañon?"

Lute shook his head mulishly. "Me and my old Sharp's is good for just one shot at a time. I figure I made plumb

Hardesty knew instinctively that he had missed.

center on the how of this here killing. I ain't drawing another bead till I see something to shoot at."

"How about tracks?" suggested Arkwright.

Again Lute shook his head. "If we was in open country I'd admire to keep my nose to the ground. But the idea of smelling around in this hell hole, instead of keeping my eyes horse high, kind of spoils my appetite. Too many big rocks, too many bends. And every one of 'em a chance of getting a slug in the belly."

NOMINAL head of the posse, Clem Arkwright didn't want to take any unnecessary risks. But while he appreciated Lute's caution, Arkwright chafed at the thought of lying behind a rock, hour after hour, waiting for Decker and his gang to back track. They would have to when they realized that they were

trapped and there was no water. If they suspected they had been followed, they might wait until dark before leaving the cañon. In that case it would be mighty hard to land them. Rocks, brush, shadows, and a poor light for shooting. Arkwright wiped his sweating face. Lute Parsons was mumbling something about wanting to take a fresh chew, but it was so hot he couldn't spare the spit. Judd and Joe exchanged amused glances.

"Boys," said Arkwright, "I'm leaving it to you. Do we hole up and wait for 'em to come out? Or do we ride in and get 'em?"

A brief silence, then Judd spoke.

"Ride in?" he said, his black eyebrows arching as if he were surprised. "Why, yes. As to getting them . . ."

"Hell ain't any hotter than it is right here," said Joe.

Lute took his chew, in spite of the heat.

"Don't let me detain you," he mumbled. "Anyhow, I got business up on the rim."

Judd dismounted and put on his coat. His white shirt would have made, he said, a real handsome target.

Arkwright took the lead, followed by Judd. Behind him Joe rode, tense and alert. Old Lute had been right. It was a fool thing to ride into the cañon against guns like Decker and Bart and Shunt. With bad footing for the horses, bends that shut off all save the immediate view, walls that shot the light back in a queer, silvery haze that danced across everything you looked at, it was a tough place to take on a fight.

The amazing blue of the cañon walls, which shaded in places to color like an outcrop of copper ore, might be pretty to look at on a cool day, when a fellow had nothing to worry about. But right now —Joe shrugged. Maybe Decker and his bunch had shied off and tried for another way to the border. There was nothing to prove they hadn't. Funny how easily a fellow could get mixed up in a job like this. Funny how Bart had come to get mixed up with Decker and the gang.

Arkwright was moving slowly, not looking for tracks now, but sending his gaze ahead. Judd was riding straight up, as if on parade. He was smoking a cigar. Judd, Joe reflected, was a lot like Bart. He didn't give a damn what happened. The horses stumbled and slipped on the rounded rocks. Joe took Schofield's Winchester from the scabbard and laid it across his legs.

Lute Parsons had tied his horse in a clump of brush west of the mouth of the cañon, and was prowling along the rim. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of Arkwright and Judd and young Joe in the cañon bottom. Once Lute paused, dropped the breech block of his Sharp's, glanced at the bright end of the forty-five-seventy shell and closed the breech.

At the base of the west wall of the cañon lay huge blocks of bluish colored rock, some as sharp-edged as if chiseled. Strangely enough, the slope from the foot of the eastern wall to the bottom was a comparatively smooth slant that looked like shale. Down the middle of the cañon, once the river bed of a long vanished stream, were occasional huge, rounded boulders. The bottom was of coarse gravel, low rounded rocks and occasional patches of sand. Joe remembered it all, only too well. Even on foot a man was obliged to pick his way carefully. It was a dead place. Not a lizard or a snake in sight. Not even a cañon wren. Too hot. There was still a strip of shadow along the foot of the eastern wall. But that wouldn't last long. Pretty soon the sun would be straight up.

"She widens out to a kind of basin, round the next bend," said Joe. Thus far they hadn't seen even a single track to prove that the gang had ridden into the cañon.

Arkwright nodded without turning his head. "We'll take it along the east wall." His voice sounded flat, lacked its customary energy.

They pushed slowly along the eastern wall. They would be a little less noticeable in the blue gray shadow of the cliff. The spreading basin glittered and gleamed in the hot light. Across the basin the cañon again narrowed. From behind that distant gateway, one man with a rifle could command the entire basin.

Creeping along like numb flies on a window ledge, they had arrived at a spot opposite the middle of the basin when

Arkwright reined up abruptly, alert.

"Sounded like a laugh," said Joe.

"It wasn't me," declared Judd dryly.

THEY sat their horses, gazing at the narrows a couple of hundred yards south. Through the still, hot air came the faint click of a shod hoof. Judd's mouth tightened. Arkwright pulled his rifle from the scabbard. Suddenly Young Joe's back felt cold. They were against the bare cañon wall. Round about there wasn't cover enough to hide a rabbit.

Arkwright spoke in a low tone. "Boys, spread out a little and stick close to the wall. There's just one chance in a million they'll ride down the middle of the basin without seeing us."

"I'll take the long end of that bet," said Judd.

The forefront of a horse showed in the narrows. Surrounded by crawling heat, horse and rider seemed to dance and waver. But there was no question as to the identity of that short, stocky figure. Looking straight ahead, Shunt came on toward the middle of the basin. Behind him rode Decker, the reins loose on his mount's neck. A few paces behind Decker, Bart rode with his hat pushed back.

They were within easy rifle shot now, out in the middle of the basin and considerably below the men watching them. Joe tried to swallow. Was Clem going to cut down on them now? Or was he going to wait until their backs showed and then let them have it? Joe glanced swiftly at Judd. The card man had his right hand tucked under the breast of his long coat. The click and plod of hoofs sounded loud in the still air.

Stiff, motionless, Arkwright, Judd and Joe stood watching the three outlaws ride slowly along. It was a bet they weren't expecting company. It was also a bet that they were mighty dry, and would head for the first water hole. That would be just west of Claybank. Perhaps that was why Arkwright hadn't started anything. Maybe Arkwright intended to let them make for Claybank and then round them up on the way. It wouldn't be hard to do. Their horses were played out.

Shunt, in the lead, had reined up. He was looking at a patch of sand directly ahead of his horse. It was here that Arkwright had swung from the middle of the cañon toward the eastern wall.

Entering the cañon that morning, the outlaws had been careful to avoid leaving tracks in the infrequent patches of sand. Naturally Arkwright had taken no such precaution.

Bart rode up alongside Shunt. "What's the idea?" Joe heard him say. "Can't you find your way out without back tracking yourself?"

Bart laughed. "Looks like they got us, Deck." In another second they had spread out, facing up the cañon. Bart had been first to spot the three figures against the eastern wall.

Judd, Arkwright and Joe had the gang covered. But that, reflected Joe, didn't mean anything.

And now Shunt had his hands in the air. Joe heard Shunt say something to Decker. Decker also put up his hands.

"You, on the bay," Arkwright called out. "Reach up!"

"Go to hell!" laughed Bart.

"Hold on!" cried Shunt. I reckon I got what you're after. Want to make a trade?"

"You're talking," said Arkwright.

"I'll drop it—right here," Shunt said. "Then we move on down the cañon. You get the money. We get a change of air."

"All right." Arkwright spoke slowly. "And don't forget I got you covered."

"Watch out for Bart—him on the bay," Joe warned Arkwright.

Shunt turned in the saddle and began to untie the gunny sack back of the cantle. Joe couldn't believe Shunt would give up so easily. There was a catch in it, somewhere. Joe held his rifle on Decker's belt buckle. Let Decker make just one little move, and the account of Old Man Embly and the dead cowboy would be squared.

BART sat his horse, watching Arkwright. Bart's hands rested on the horn. Shunt was fumbling at the tie knots. Finally he loosened them. The gunny sack slid to the ground. Shunt straightened up

and drew his arm across his sweating face.

"All right," he called to Arkwright. But that was meant for Decker and Bart.

Shunt's arm dropped and his gun came up. He was out of the saddle and behind his horse a fraction of a second before a slug from Arkwright's Winchester dropped the horse in its tracks. Joe let loose a shot at Decker, and missed. At the same instant, keeping his horse moving, Decker fired at Arkwright. The bullet struck the barrel of Arkwright's Winchester and splattered against the cañon wall. Judd, on foot, and Bart, mounted, were firing at each other.

Shunt, behind his dead horse, cut loose, and Judd flinched. Arkwright was trying to get Decker, so Joe threw shot after shot at Shunt. Decker, whose six gun was empty, jumped his horse round and again faced the cliff, his carbine at his shoulder.

Arkwright's rifle was also empty. He dropped it.

"Come on, boys," he said. "Let's clean 'em up."

He swung into the saddle. As Judd mounted slowly, a slug from Decker's carbine left him hatless. The card man leaned forward and spurred after Arkwright.

Joe loosed a final shot at Shunt, then, ducking round Shingles, slipped into the saddle. Slugs spattered against the cañon wall behind him. He jerked Schofield's six shooter from the holster. Both Judd and Arkwright were heading straight for Decker. Decker's carbine snarled. Arkwright's horse, a big, high-headed animal, turned a complete hoolihan. The ex-cattleman was thrown head first to the ground. Judd spurred past him, chopping down as he continued to fire at Decker.

Bart was coming toward Joe at a reckless lope. Joe cursed the luck that had put him up against Bart. Perhaps Bart felt the same way about it, for he reined in. To Joe's surprise Bart shoved his gun into the holster. He grinned.

"Where you goin', Hardesty?"

"Hell, Bart—"

"Ain't it, though?"

Suddenly the cañon was still. Afraid to take his eyes off Bart, Young Joe wondered what had happened to the others. But Bart knew. He was smiling as he said, "All bets are off, Hardesty. It's you or me. Too bad it had to break this way."

"You mean?"

"You ain't fast enough to put me down."

"Mebbyso. But if you mean business. . . ."

"So long, kid!" cried Bart. His hand flashed to his holster. Joe fired. He knew instantly that he had missed. Yet Bart jerked forward in the saddle. His gun slipped from his hand. He toppled and fell. Not Joe, but someone else had got him.

Judd, a lean, black figure, stood some distance away, holding a gun on Decker. Arkwright lay beside his horse. The puzzled look left Joe's face as he heard a faint halloo from the western rim of the cañon. Lute Parsons was up on the rim, waving his hat. "Did I get him?" the old man shouted.

There had been something queer about the way Bart had acted. Instead of firing as he came on the lope, he had holstered his gun. And he must have known that Joe could have dropped him as they talked.

Bart's gun lay on the sand where it had fallen when the slug from Lute Parsons' Sharp's had hit him between the shoulders. Joe picked up the gun, intending to keep it. Through force of habit he twirled the cylinder. The gun was empty.

Yet there were plenty of shells in Bart's belt.

"Hell!" Joe muttered. "He knew it was empty. Looks like he just asked me to kill him."

Bart had known that he was all through. He wanted to go out quick. Joe chewed his lower lip. Bart had given him a break—a big break. Looked like Bart had wanted it just that way.

Joe turned and walked over to where Judd stood holding a gun on Decker, whose hands were empty. Decker's left arm hung limp. His hand dripped red.

"Is this the fella that beefed Mark Embly?" said Judd.

Joe nodded. Decker's bony, sallow

face was a mask. But fear burned in his pale eyes.

"It's a damn lie!" he said in a thin voice. "Blaze got Embly."

"Mebby Blaze got Apache and Chiselface, likewise," said Joe.

Judd's face was white. "Mark Embly was a friend of mine."

Joe saw what was coming. Turning, he was walking to where Clem Arkwright, on hands and knees, was trying to get up. A shot sounded. In spite of himself Joe glanced back. Decker was on the ground. Judd stood looking down at him.

JOE walked back to where Bart lay. Bart was done for. There was too much blood. . . .

Bart moved, seemed trying to sit up.

Joe fetched his canteen, raised Bart so that he could drink. He didn't drink much.

"Thanks, Hardesty," he gasped. Fumbling at his belt, Bart pulled a shell from it. His blue lips almost shaped in a grin. "Meet the boss."

The shell tinkled on the rocks. Bart's head fell back. Joe eased him down. Joe's face was grim. He felt sick.

Arkwright had been stunned by the fall from his horse. But in spite of Decker's efforts to put him down, he hadn't been hit. He limped over to where the gunny sack lay on the sand.

Joe caught up Bart's horse. Arkwright's mount had been killed. As Joe was leading the horse over to Arkwright, he passed the spot where Shunt lay, the top of his head blown off. Shunt had been game, but Bart—he had 'em all beat.

With the butt of Bart's carbine, Joe scraped a shallow trench in the sand. He covered the body with rocks. As for the others—if the sheriff didn't come and check up on 'em, the coyotes surely would.

Lute Parsons was squatting on his haunches and smoking his pipe when they arrived at the mouth of the cañon. He displayed no curiosity other than to look them over. They had gone after the gang. They had got 'em. That was sufficient.

Judd took off his coat. There was a hole through the upper part of his right shoulder. Lute bandaged it carefully for him.

"Kind of queer," remarked Joe, "Decker got it in the left arm, likewise."

"Did he?" Judd said dryly. "Now I thought he got it in the stomach. My mistake."

In the afternoon shadows they took the trail eastward. The heat alone was enough to keep them silent. But no one wanted to talk. Not until they reached the outskirts of Claybank did anyone speak. Then Arkwright said, "Boys, we got what we went after. Speaking for myself, I ain't so damn proud of the job. But it had to be done. The money belonged to my depositors."

"Did Mark Embly bank with you, Clem?" asked Judd.

"No. He banked in Bowdry."

"Well, it wouldn't have made any difference, anyway," said Judd. "Glad they didn't clean me," he added as Arkwright looked puzzled. Judd was a comparatively big depositor in his bank.

Joe got it. But he said nothing. Judd had gone after the man that had killed Mark Embly.

As they rode down the main street of Claybank Arkwright said, "Boys, I'm going to credit your accounts with five hundred dollars each. All I ask is that you don't talk about the robbery, and what happened later. Fifteen hundred is letting me off mighty easy, considering."

"I reckon," said Lute, "I got to get drunk. Judd, here, ain't no company drinking. How about you, Joe?"

"Count me out of both deals. If I liquor up, I'll do it my own way."

"Didn't know you could afford to turn down five hundred, Joe." Arkwright pulled up his horse. They had arrived at Schofield's livery.

"Mebby I can't. But this journey. . . ." Joe paused. "What I mean, I never did any killin' for hire."

"That ain't my idea either," declared Arkwright.

"Words don't count a hell of a lot with me, Clem. It's mostly what a fella does. Like—"

Joe paused. He didn't want to talk any more. He was thinking of Bart.

"God, can't one of you riflemen reach him?"

SMOKE IN THE HILLS

A NOVELETTE

By John Murray Reynolds

THE pine knots on the hearth crackled into life, and a red glow touched the log walls of the cabin. Calvin Lorton's loose moccasins scraped on the splintery puncheons of the floor as he padded across to get his rifle, which leaned beside the door with powder-horn and shot pouch hanging from the muzzle. The night dampness might have spoiled the priming. He opened the pan and blew out the powder, then pulled the nipple of the horn and poured a thin stream of black grains to fill the pan anew. Caution was essential to the settlers of the Mohawk Valley in that year of peril and blood.

The bars of the door squeaked in their sockets as Cal pushed them back. A cold dawn revealed everything as far as the edge of the forest, though a thin mist still hung low to the ground. The stalks in the cornfield were grotesque shapes.

From the log barn to his left there came faint sounds of stirring life, and there was a sudden cackling from the chicken-run. In the cabin behind, he heard deep breathing from the bed where his wife still lay asleep and some whispered conversation across the room, where his sister slept with her two children. They had been very crowded since Hilda had come to stay with them, after her husband had been killed at Oriskany.

Calvin plodded across to the well with his rifle in the crook of his left arm and his woolen nightshirt fluttering in the breeze. His coarse black hair was a tangled mop and he looked older than his thirty years, for the skin was stretched tight over his high cheek bones, where sun and wind had weathered it. His eyes were wrinkled at the corners from long hours of plowing against the sun, but they were unquiet eyes with a vague dissatisfaction in them.

Calvin Lorton, seemed a fitting counter-part of the grim wilderness that was upper New York in that year of trouble and unrest, a suitable master for the bleak cabin of squared logs and the few rangy livestock in the barn.

Deep into a bucket of icy water from the well Cal plunged his head, then groped about on the coping of the well for his willow twig and brushed his teeth with its frayed end. He took a mouthful of water and squirted it out through his teeth. He pulled off his night-shirt and splashed water all over his chest, then ran back to the cabin. The pine knots were crackling sharply now, and the warmth of the blaze was pleasant.

Fully dressed at last, in homespun breeches and a leathern shirt, Calvin walked over to the pole bed and looked down at his wife. She had been a Palatine girl from Old Schoharie, and her hair had been the color of corn-silk. Now it was faintly streaked with gray. The wilderness was hard on women! Gretchen had three times tried to bear him a child, but always they died at birth. She looked tired as she slept, and Cal touched her hair for a moment. Then he shook her shoulder.

"Sunrise, Gretchen. Time to get up," he said, and stamped out to look at the stock.

Cal picked up his rifle from beside the door as he went out. This was a favorite hour of the day for raids by wandering Mohawks or Tories. It was only a month ago that Chris Heiler had been shot and scalped as he stepped from the door in the early morning. With one long finger Calvin tested the flint of his rifle, to be sure it was firmly seated.

BREAKFAST was ready by the time Cal came back from the barn. Pewter plates of steaming salt pork and porridge stood on the table beside a jug of milk.

"I aim to finish the fall plowing this morning," he said while busily chewing his pork. "Then go into the middle fort for supplies this afternoon."

"I wish you wouldn't go right now," Gretchen said.

"Why not?"

"Things have been quiet in the Valley since the Mohawks burned Canajoharie in early August, but folk say there's another raid in the wind. I don't like for Hilda and the children and me to be left alone here."

"A stray renegade won't bother you as long as you stay in the cabin with the door shut." Cal said.

"That trader who passed yesterday said that folk around Fonda's Bush have seen smoke in the hills."

"Indian smoke?"

"So they say."

"Nonsense," Cal said impatiently. "All they saw was a bit of autumn mist. There'll be no more trouble till spring. I've got to have powder and shot, and I want to fetch it before the weather gets colder. Don't worry."

Finished with their breakfast, Hilda's children went scampering outdoors. Calvin called to them to stay near the house. He finished the last of his own meal, wiped his fingers on his breeches, and then went out to the barn. After harnessing the team to the hand-forged plow, he slung his rifle on his back. It was awkward, but the upper end of the north field was quite a piece away from the cabin.

The sun was well up and there was a trace of warmth in the air. Cal shouted at the horses as he bore down on the handles of the plow. He was sick of farming! Nothing ever happened here. He wished he could get Gretchen to stay in one of the settlements and go off to join the army to fight the British! There was some adventure in a life like that. Here, there was nothing but work, and he couldn't even make a trip into the middle fort without having Gretchen start an argument about it!

Women couldn't understand that a man needed to get in and talk to other men once in a while. He hadn't seen anyone but old Ransom at the next farm in three weeks, nor had a drink of liquor. He wanted to see people. Also, he wanted to talk to Lana Tybert. Lana, with her red lips that were always mocking! Gretchen wouldn't understand that either, though he'd never done anything more than talk to the girl. He picked up a handful of pebbles and flung them at the plodding team ahead to urge them to greater speed.

Gradually a degree of contentment came back to Calvin Lorton. The steady routine of plowing acted like an opiate. He liked the long drift across the field with the turn at each end; he liked to watch the moist brown earth turning out of the furrow At the north end of the field he halted the team for a moment and pulled off his wide-brimmed hat to wipe the sweat from his forehead —then stiffened in every muscle as a tall Iroquois stepped out of the bushes immediately before him!

No time to unsling the rifle now! Cal had pulled his knife from its sheath in an instinctive reaction before he recognized the Indian as a friendly Oneida. The Iroquois was painted for war, streaked from brow to waist with red and yellow pigment, and his freshly shaven top-knot gleamed in the sun.

"*Koue,* Black Arrow," Calvin said in his stumbling Oneida. "What brings you here?" The Indian touched the polished war hatchet at his belt.

"I bring you warning, my friend. The Senecas are painting themselves black."

"War?"

"It is so. There are red hatchets and black wampum on the war-post of every village."

"Are you really sure of all this?" Calvin asked. "They say that the Johnsons and Butlers are safely back at Fort Niagara and will not trouble us again this fall."

The Oneida made a gesture of impatience.

"I have seen their smokes in the hills myself. It is not my custom to talk in empty phrases. *Hiro*—I have spoken."

With a quick, guarded motion Black Arrow picked up his rifle and vanished into the forest, leaving behind him not a ripple in that sea of greenery. With a shrug, Calvin turned back to finish his plowing. He could see Gretchen standing in the door of the cabin, one hand lifted to shade her eyes, and when he reached the near end of the field she called to him.

"Who was that Indian?"

"Black Arrow, the Oneida. You know him," Calvin said. Gretchen's voice was troubled.

"He was painted for war, Cal. What did he say about that smoke in the hills?"

"We didn't talk about it!" Calvin snapped.

Gretchen turned back into the cabin, and Cal snorted as he shook the reins once more. Women were always worrying! They should depend on the judgment of their men folk and leave all that sort of thing to them. He reckoned that he could tell what was coming better than any woman! Scattered renegades might wander the valley, but there was no danger to any cabin where the people were alert.

THEY were all sitting down to the mid-day meal when the forest-runner came out of the woods and walked across the clearing with his easy stride. Long thrums tossed on sleeve and leggin, and the tail of his coonskin cap swayed over one shoulder. His long rifle rested in the hollow of his left arm. Gretchen had already set another slab of bread on the table and begun to heap it with smoking greens and bacon by the time the stranger reached the door.

"Howdy," he said, "Name of Clark. Nate Clark."

The newcomer was about Calvin's height, though lean and wiry, and he had the pallor of the deep forest where the sunlight comes only in mottled patches. He was young, in his early twenties, and he spoke in a slow drawl.

"No trappin' now," he said in answer to Calvin's question. "Autumn pelts are never any good." Gretchen had leaned forward with her elbows on the table, and her blue eyes were troubled.

"Folks about here say the Tories and Indians are raiding again," she said. "Did you see any sign of war parties in the woods?"

Nate Clark smiled shyly and lifted his shot pouch up onto the table. Attached to the bottom was a freshly taken scalp. The greasy hair was braided with a single eagle's feather. The children squealed with delight, and Calvin stared at the grisly thing with a fascinated revulsion. He knew that forest-runners, and even men of irregular regiments like Morgan's Rifles, had adopted the custom of scalping their fallen foemen, but he had never become accustomed to the idea.

"I shot him last night, ten miles beyond the upper fort," Nate said with evident pride.

"What kind is it?"

"Seneca." The ranger's long forefinger indicated the peculiar method of braiding. "He was alone, but he was painted for war. I spoke about it at the upper fort, and they'll fire three cannon as a warning to folks like you if anything happens."

"I reckon you have to be pretty careful when running the forests," Cal said. Clark looked surprised.

"It's not so hard. A man can always keep hidden in the woods. You people on farms have to be a sight more careful. A raiding party always knows where to find you! It's a wonder to me that folk stay on farms at all in these troubled days."

"We have to stay," Gretchen interposed quickly. "The Continental army needs grain, and we of County Tryon have got to grow it. I reckon that we on the valley farms are about as necessary to the country as the army itself!"

There was a ring of pride in Gretchen's voice, and Cal stared at her in surprise. He himself was too busy with raising the crops to give much thought to what they meant. Chris Heiler had been saying something about the importance of County Tryon crops the last time he saw the old man, before the Mohawks got him.

"Aye!" Calvin said with sudden bitterness. "The bread for the army comes from Tryon County, but there's blood baked in every loaf!"

When the meal was over, the two men stood outside in the sun for a moment. Nate Clark looked at the priming of his rifle, and scuffed his moccasins in the dust.

"Reckon I'll be getting along to the middle fort. Want to come with me?" he asked. Calvin hesitated. Gretchen wouldn't like it, but he did need powder and shot. He thought of the noisy crowd that there was sure to be in Blake's Ordinary, and of how some of Blake's fiery Monongahela would taste on his tongue! It wasn't as though there was any real danger to Gretchen and Hilda and the children. Rumors were always thick as fleas along the border, and these new ones didn't mean a thing.

Gretchen was scrubbing the hearth, and she turned to face him as he came in.

"I'm going to the fort for those supplies," he said. "Nate Clark will be company for me on the way." With a sigh Gretchen laid down the twig broom she had been holding. Her eyes were shadowed.

"I wish you wouldn't go right now, Cal. I'm nervous."

"There's no call to be," he said irritably. As though a man were not his own master in things of this sort! "Don't pay any attention to those rumors."

"This is our farm, Cal!" Gretchen said. "It's all we have. It's our land, and I reckon land is about the most important thing there is."

"There isn't going to be any trouble." With an effort Calvin controlled his temper. "If anything happens, you can go right across to Ransom's place. It's only a little over a mile."

"It's not easy to find the way in the dark."

"Who said I was going to stay at the fort all night?" he demanded. She gave him a slow glance.

"You always do, Cal. You'll get to drinking and talking with some of the Rangers and militia there, and stay over. You always do."

"I won't even take a drink this time. I'll get the supplies and stay an hour and be back by dark."

"Go ahead. I don't reckon I can stop you," she said, and turned to her work once more. With a grunt, Calvin picked up his rifle and went out the door. Once he glanced back through the portal, but Gretchen did not turn around.

THE trail through the forest was cool in the shade. The air was heavy with the scent of of sweet fern and balsam. Nate led the way, moving swiftly along with his bent-legged woodsman's stride and his shoulders scarcely swaying. Calvin had trouble keeping up with him, and he was puffing by the time they reached the road with its rutted marks of freighters' wagons.

He was sorry he'd left Gretchen so abruptly. It was probably hard for a woman to realize that a man needed a little excitement now and then. There was no adventure in sticking on a farm. But—maybe Gretchen wasn't having much fun staying there herself! Cal's stride began to slacken. He suddenly realized that Gretchen didn't smile very often nowadays, and that he had been too busy with the farm work to do much talking. It seemed funny to think that a woman could be lonely in her husband's cabin, but that might be the case.

Cal stopped in the middle of the road. He was tempted to back-trail right now —only he didn't want Nate Clark to think he was the kind of a man who didn't know his own mind.

"Coming?" the forest runner asked, glancing back over his shoulder.

"Jest stopped to ease my belt a mite," Cal said, and hurried to catch up with the other man. After all, he'd be back at the cabin by dark and he could make things up with Gretchen then.

On the broader road the two men walked side by side. Nate was talking of the prospects for the winter's trapping, which would probably be good if nothing happened to interfere.

"I reckon I can charge the loss of a lot of fine pelts up to the Bloody-Backs last year," he said. "I went to fight at Saratoga when Johnny Burgoyne marched south, and I took a bullet through the leg that laid me up for quite a spell."

"I wish I could go trapping!" Calvin said. "It's what Ive always wanted to do, now that I think of it! A man is really living then. Not like being stuck on a farm."

"I'd be right glad to have you with me this winter," Nate said. "We could handle a smart line of traps between us."

It was early in the afternoon when the forest fell away before them and they came to the broad clearing that held the middle fort. A full score of houses and barns were spread out across the fields, with some small shacks clustered down by the creek. The stockade mass of the fort was set on a slight rise on the far side of the settlement. It had small bastions at the corners. The log gates were open, but sunlight gleamed on the steel of musket barrels above the stockade and the brazen muzzles of cannon showed through open embrasures. Nate began to whistle through his teeth, and Calvin felt a sudden lifting of the spirits as they drew nearer the settlement.

Some soldiers were cutting wood as they passed. The sergeant in charge, a stocky man in the brown and red of the Tryon County militia, spat tobacco juice through his beard and shouted to Nate Clark.

"Hi there, forest-runner! See any varmints in the woods?"

"None around here," Nate answered. "But I shot one ten miles above the upper fort last night." He touched the fresh scalp hanging from his shot-pouch, and the sergeant laughed.

"Zounds, the younker's got a scalp! You want to talk to Tim Murphy, lad. Likely you'll find him over at Blake's place."

A large log building, close under the walls of the fort, had a swinging sign that bore the legend "Blake's Ordinary." As

the newcomers drew close to the tavern, a gangling militiaman, seated on a bench outside with his wig and cocked hat very much askew, waved a pewter mug in greeting.

"How-de-do, Cal Lorton! Welcome to the setllement!"

"How're you, Phil?" Cal answered. "You know Nate Clark? This is Philip Graft."

"Often called the pride of the army," Graft added with drunken gravity.

"Pride of the guardhouse, most likely! Have they triced you up to the whipping post for a little discipline lately, Phil?"

"You mistake me, sir!" Graft waved the mug, then ceased and peered at it suspiciously as some of the liquor slopped out. "Go on inside and have a drink. I'll fix you a shake-down in the barracks for tonight."

"Fix nothing. I jest aim to get some supplies and start right back. I look to be home by dark."

"You sick or something?" Graft inquired anxiously. Calvin ignored him and went inside.

THE door had been closed against the autumnal chill, and as Calvin opened it a gust of noise and a wave of varied smells swept out to meet them. The odor was a compound of stale beer, unwashed bodies, furs, frying pork, and a dozen other ingredients too subtle for definition. Nate wrinkled his nose in disgust.

"I hate the stench of the settlement!" he said. "I'm going to have a drink."

A dozen or more men were scattered about the tables in the taproom as the two newcomers leaned their rifles against the wall by the door. Most were soldiers or militiamen from the garrison; a few were settlers. There were three forest-runners, including a heavy-set man whose buckskins were elaborately beaded and were fringed with green thrums. Calvin went through to the back room that served as a store, where Blake himself came to see to his wants. He was an enormously fat man, and he must once have been even heavier, for his skin hung in loose folds. Large portions of his face shook when he moved

Time for tears later! Her shoulder jumped to the recoil as she fired.

his head. His homespun breeches, Holland shirt and knitted waistcoat were alike in being indescribably dirty. At the moment, his watery eyes and shapeless mouth were distorted in a welcoming smile.

"Right glad to have you back, Cal!" he said. "It's been quite a spell since I seen you. What'll you have? How about some trinket for Lana?"

"God Almighty, no!" Calvin growled. "Doesn't anybody in town think I came here for anything but her, just because I talked to her for an hour the last time? Give me some sugar and salt, and some powder and shot."

"No offense, my boy, no offense!" Blake rumbled. He was exuding geniality like perspiration as he climbed on a box to reach the upper shelves.

Calvin wrapped his purchases in a tar-

paulin and slung them over his shoulder. Blake watched him with wide and watery eyes that were coldly calculating.

"Not figuring on headin' right back, are you Cal?" he asked.

"Sure am. I look to be home before dark."

"I don't know what's come over you, Cal! Won't be right if you don't stay around to talk with the boys for a while. At least come out and have one drink on the house."

Out in the tap room, Calvin leaned on the wooden counter while Blake poured out a drink from a stone jug. His unsteady hand spilled some of the liquor on the stained deal top of the counter. From across the room came a gust of noisy laughter, and a deep voice that curiously combined an Irish brogue with a southern drawl.

"Gorry, younker!" it bellowed, "I never did hear that one before!"

Some militiamen from a working party came trapping in with their boots loud on the puncheon floor. Their sleeves were rolled up to the elbows.

For a moment Calvin inspected the whiskey Blake had poured him in a pewter cup. Then he drank it off in a gulp. The fiery liquid made his eyes smart, but it was warm and pleasant as it went down. By God, it was good to have a drink again! He must take some back to the cabin with him.

"Let me have a small jug to take along," he said.

"Glad to, Cal. Here y'are, fourth proof and best quality. Have another drink on the house."

"No, thanks. I want to get home."

From across the room came another deep burst of laughter. A moment later Calvin heard Nate Clark calling him.

"Lorton! Come over here. I want you to shake hands with Tim Murphy of Morgan's Rifles. These other boys say they know you already."

MURPHY was the owner of the deep voice Calvin had heard a moment before. A broad-shouldered giant of a man, he was a magnificent figure in fringed and beaded buckskins. His beaver cap was pushed to the back of curly head, and there were red quills on his moccasins. Murphy, one of the survivors of Lieutenant Boyd's ill-fated party massacred beyond Seneca Castle, was already becoming a border legend. Calvin stared at him in frank interest. The men of the frontier said that, with the possible exception of Dave Elerson, Murphy was the best shot from Fort Niagara southward. Now he rose a little unsteadily to his feet, a broad grin on his ruddy face.

"Sure, 'tis a pleasure to know you, sor!" he said to Calvin in his rich brogue. "You are just in time to join in a toast I am about to propose." He shoved a spare mug across the table with one great paw. "Gentlemen, I give you Danny Morgan—and the Eleventh Virginia Regiment!"

They were all on their feet then, rising with a shout, and the militiamen in the room grinned in sympathy. Morgan's Rifles had become a tradition in the Continental army. Together with the warmth of the liquor, already firing his blood, Calvin felt a sudden glow at being seen in such distinguished company. He was conscious of the admiring glances of the other patrons of the tavern.

"Got time for another before you start back?" Nate asked. He had thrown his belt with its knife and war hatchet into a corner, and his face was beginning to flush. He looked more at ease than when he had first come into the room. Calvin glanced out the glassless window at the sinking sun.

"Reckon I might manage to stay a little while longer," he said.

More customers straggled in as time passed, and the tavern became crowded. The tables were filled with a motley, noisy throng. Settlers in homespun and broad hats, militia in brown and red, three-months-men in blue and buff, trappers in buckskin—they were all intermingled. They banged their mugs on the tables, shook long fingers and argued in loud voices. Gideon Blake, ever sensitive to the volume of business, beamed at them all as he bustled to and fro.

Calvin's whole being seemed to be pervaded by a pleasant glow. The liquor was good. The company was good. It

was fine to be back in a crowd again, after the long weeks on the farm. Solitude was all right for forest-runners like Nate, who would vanish in a day or so and go back into the woods once more, but he liked company! He wished he lived in the settlement. Several times Nate looked across at him and said:

"Thought you had to get home."

"That's all right," Calvin answered. "Don't fret about me. I can find my way back in the dark."

"If some Mohawk doesn't lift your hair on the way!" one of the Rangers suggested with a twisted smile. Calvin tapped himself on the chest.

"No Indian is going to get me!" he said. Murphy chuckled deep down in his throat.

"Hark to the lad! Wait till you've seen as many of them as I have!" He pulled off his baldric and flung it on the table. Its whole length was fringed with scalps dyed red.

IT WAS getting dark. Candles were flickering on the tables while their smoke mingled with the tobacco haze. Night intensified the noise of the talk, which seemed to float up to the log-raftered ceiling and then bounce back again. Calvin had no recollection of ordering dinner, but after a while he found himself eating a dish of salt pork and greasy potatoes. One of the three-months-men threw an iron mug full of beer at another man, and started a brawl while Blake squealed shrilly for order in his house, but a group of friends threw them both outside and comparative peace was restored.

Some time later Calvin found himself at a table with two sergeants in blue and buff. They were suggesting an enlistment, and holding forth on the joys of army life, and Calvin was nodding sagely.

"That sounds good," he was saying. "That's what I've always wanted to do. Always wished I'd gone into the army instead of going in for farming." For a while he brooded on the idea, then stared into his mug and found it empty. He was peering through the smoky haze for Blake's black boy to fetch him some more liquor when Nate Clark's hand fell on his shoulder.

"Come on, Cal," Nate said. "It's time you got started home."

Calvin found his bundle lying on the floor in a corner, and again slung the thongs over his shoulders. He picked up his rifle and lurched out the door with Nate beside him. It seemed almost cold out here, by contrast with the sweaty interior of the tavern, and the air cleared his head a little. He glanced up at the stars, clear as silver beading on a dark cloth, and tried to breathe deeply. Two settlers went slowly by, and glanced at the noisy interior of the tavern.

"That place is a disgrace," one of them said. "Major Woolsley should close it."

"You'll always have that sort of thing when you have soldiers around," the other answered with a shrug.

A wave of sudden remorse swept over Calvin. He should have started back to the farm hours ago! He had forgotten all about his determination to stay at the fort only an hour at the most. Resolutely he shouldered his rifle.

"Thanks, Nate, I'll get started," he said. Just then a girl came into the glow of light that streamed from the cabin windows.

Lana Tybert walked slowly up to Calvin with her hands on her swaying hips. There was laughter in her dark eyes. Her pink calico gown clung close to her body, revealing the strong swell of her breasts and giving a hint of rounded thighs. The light glinted on her coiled hair. It was black as the waters of the creek on a moonless night, and was not cut short like most frontier women but worn long and coiled around her head.

"Howdy, Calvin," she said in her low-pitched voice. "I heard you were in town."

He dropped the butt of his rifle to the ground and leaned on the muzzle.

"Well, I don't know who told you," he said. She came to put both hands on his arm, and the perfume on her hair was strong in his nostrils.

"We had a right nice time when you were last at the fort," she said. "You ain't mad at me?"

"No, Lana, but I've no time to stay

and talk tonight. I've got to get right back to the farm."

"Can't you just come in and buy one drink for an old friend before you go?" She leaned her body against him, and Calvin sighed.

"I reckon I might stay for just a few minutes more," he said. Nate Clark moved impatiently.

"You'd better get started," he said.

"Leave me alone," Calvin said thickly. "I'm all right."

"Suit yourself. It's one with me." The trapper went lurching back into the tavern. A new gust of laughter greeted his reappearance, and a moment later Murphy's deep voice began to rise in a ballad of the Border:

"There's Painted Death on the trail tonight,
And a smear of blood on the moon,
And the moccasin tracks go two by two. . . ."

Lana was still holding his arm with both hands, and now she drew him toward the door.

"Just come in and buy me one drink and talk for a few minutes, Cal," she said.

"I can only stay a moment." He leaned his rifle against the wall by the door, and dropped his bundle in the corner. He found his feet a little unsteady as he pulled his chair up to the table. "I can't stay but a moment," he repeated. . . .

THE crowing of a cock aroused Calvin Lorton when the east was just beginning to pale, and it took him a moment to realize that it was not the voice of his own rooster at home. Dimming stars were over his head instead of the familiar cabin roof. Against the sky showed the serrated top of a log palisade. He was sore and stiff from sleeping on the damp ground, and he was shivering mightily in the chill. He knew now that he lay in a corner of the stockade of the middle fort.

As Calvin sat upright, a wave of nausea swept over him. The stars seemed to dance above him, like sparks shooting up from a plastered chimney! He gripped his aching head in both hands and set his teeth in his tongue. On dragging feet he moved to the well in the center of the big enclosure. He sank his head in a bucket of cold water for a few moments, and then he drank deeply from a hollow gourd that hung from a chain.

Someone had placed Calvin's rifle beside him. He ran his fingers over the lock for a moment, and renewed the priming by sense of touch. There was a certain relief in the familiar and homely task. A few feet away lay the tarpaulin bundle of supplies he had bought from Blake. Above his head sounded a dragging tread as a sentry moved slowly along the firing platform of the stockade. In the strengthening light he could see another sentry leaning on the parapet across the way. His musket barrel was a pale ribbon of silver, and the bowl of his short pipe gave out a fitful glow.

Shouldering his rifle, Calvin moved across to the well and took another drink from the gourd. The later events of last evening were very dim in his mind, fragmentary pictures like the shattered reflections when a stone is thrown in the smooth surface of a river. He had still meant to go back to the farm when he finally pulled himself away from Blake's Ordinary, but the liquor had got to him worse than he had thought. All he could remember from that point was that two militiamen had taken him in tow and brought him up into the fort. It was probably a good thing at that, he reflected wearily. In his befuddled condition he could never have found the way home and would probably have blundered squarely into some Seneca war party.

A war party! Calvin dropped the gourd so that its chain rattled against the stones of the well. His fists were clenched and tense. God Almighty, what if a war party had come by the farm during the night? Gretchen had his other rifle, and there was a pistol in the house, but two women and two small children could never defend the cabin. Picking up his rifle, he went to the nearest ladder leading up to the firing step. He had to find out how soon the gates of the fort would be opened.

Dim figures leaned on the parapet

above the gate, muskets thrust out between the logs. One of them turned swiftly at Calvin's approach, and when close enough he recognized Philip Graft. The gangling militiaman looked at him with a wry smile.

"How're you feelin' this morning, Cal?"

"Poorly."

"I don't wonder. You were in a bad fix when we brought you in here last night."

"Was it you brought me in?"

"Aye, me and that big oaf Lupus Van Horn. We were feelin' pretty well fixed ourselves." He rubbed his forehead reflectively. "But we were a long way behind you."

"My thanks for it," Calvin said. "How soon can I get out of here?"

"In about half an hour. We've only two hundred men here all told, including the militia and the three-months-men, and the major won't let the gates be opened till the sun's well up. Won't you be stayin' for breakfast?"

"No. I'll eat when I get back."

"If you ask me, it's about time you thought of gettin' back there!" Graft rubbed his unshaven chin with bony fingers, and his eyes were bloodshot. "It's all right for someone like me to spend a night swillin' Monongahela in Blake's place, but a feller like you that has a wife and folks back in the cabin ought not. . . ."

"All right!" Cal interrupted, "I know. Don't rub it in."

THE minutes dragged interminably as the eastern sky grew steadily brighter. Calvin Lorton clenched his teeth to keep them from chattering in the chill. There was, of course, no danger that anything had gone wrong at the cabin. They would have heard the signal guns at the upper fort if there was any trouble in the valley, but he wanted to get back as soon as possible. He wondered if Gretchen had slept. Probably not. She had probably lain awake listening for him.

It would not be easy to face her

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now, on top of what she had said, but he could straighten it out. He was impatient to get back.

Calvin rested his rifle against one of the logs and leaned his elbows on the top of the palisade. The ache at the back of his skull had somewhat subsided, but his head was still ringing. He breathed deeply of the cool, damp air which felt good in his lungs. It was definitely lighter now, light enough to see all the cabins and shacks of the settlement below the fort with the gray-green wall of the forest behind them.

The burnt-over stretch in front of the fort looked desolate. The stumps were raw and ugly. Smoke was beginning to rise in thin columns from the chimneys of several houses. He wondered if Gretchen had found enough coals to kindle the fire all right this morning! The furthermost cabin of the settlement before him was sending up an unusual lot of smoke, and he watched it idly. Then his heart seemed to skip a beat—for that smoke was not coming from the chimney! The house was afire!

The smoke rose more thickly every second, grayish black against the misty sky. It began to curl up from under the eaves. Even as the muffled sound of a musket shot came drifting down on the breeze, little tongues of bright flame began to play about one end of the roof.

Calvin gripped Graft's arm and pointed wordlessly. After a single glance the lanky militiaman fired his musket in the air, and let out a great bellow that brought the sergeant of the guard on the run. The sergeant gave one glance across the palisade, and then jumped down from the firing step without bothering with the ladder. He landed sprawling in the mud, scrambled to his feet, and started for one of the central buildings at a dead run.

Calvin spun back to peer over the parapet. That first house was burning furiously now, and painted figures were slipping wraith-like from the shelter of the brush toward the next cabin. He flung up his rifle and fired at them, then swore through clenched teeth as he saw his bullet kick up a black gout of mud a good yard away from his target.

Calvin dropped the butt of his rifle to the planks and hastily began to reload. Furiously wielding the rammer, he glanced back into the enclosure of the fort. The sergeant had reappeared with a drummer boy who wore only a pair of short breeches.

At once the rolling thunder of the alarm drum filled the air. The boy stood with his feet wide apart, the sleep still in his eyes but his hands busy pounding the thundering cowhide. The dull thud of more musket shots drifted across the settlement, and the thin sound of a scalp yell. The other sentries on the platform had begun to fire. The sound of the discharges rang out on the morning air, and white smoke swam up above the stockade. A woman with a smoking match in her hand scrambled up a ladder and fired one of the brass three-pounders for an alarm gun. The heavy report echoed from the heights across the stream, and the gun rocked back on its carriage.

The militia were mustering within the enclosure of the fort. Major Woolsey appeared from his cabin and ran to climb to the firing step above the gate. He had put on his uniform coat over the drawers in which he had been sleeping, and he looked very red-faced and flustered. When he saw settlers from the nearest cabins streaming toward the fort he shouted an order to open the gates, but to have a score of three-months-men form outside with loaded muskets as a covering detachment.

More men had climbed to the parapet and were firing in furious haste at the Mohawks skulking toward the cluster of cabins along the creek. The gates swung open a little wider as Lieutenant Spencer led two score militiamen out at the double to cover the flight of the settlers who were now streaming toward the fort from all directions.

Now the head of a column appeared through the trees across the creek. The gray light of dawn glinted on the slanting barrels of their shouldered muskets. The scarlet tunics of a company of British regulars were in the lead, followed by rank on rank of men in green. Johnson's Royal Greens! The vindictive Tories who followed that dishonored son of a noble father! Mohawks and Senecas ran before them, spreading out like the

The black painted figure of a Cayuga rose up amid the cat-tails.

spokes of a fan, painted figures against the green of the fields. Toward the small rise to the east of the fort moved another column, dragging two brass mortars. A bearded militiaman on Calvin's right spat savagely.

"Aye! Tunics of black and orange! Yonder march Butler's Rangers, the murderers of Cherry Valley!" A woman who had climbed to the firing step to bring her husband a double handful of fresh bullets said in a toneless voice:

"So it's hatchet and scalping knife again! Why in the name of God can't they leave us alone?"

To Calvin Lorton it all seemed some-

how unreal. The cabins and shacks below were like children's toys, the flat gray sky was a canvas on which someone had painted a fringe of forest in gray and green. The columns toiling painfully forward were puppets. The bright tongues of flame that were now licking at three or four of the houses were a delusion. Only the acrid smell, creeping to his nostrils as the strengthening breeze bore a tinge of smoke, was real.

THE firing step was now crowded with three-months-men. Shirt sleeves rolled up to their brawny elbows, cocked hats pushed well back on their heads, they stood leaning against the logs of the epaulment. Their eyes were hard but calm; their lean jaws were grim. The habit of discipline held them silent. The enemy was not yet within range of their smooth-bore muskets. Only the scattered riflemen were firing now, leaning at their loopholes with intent concentration as they fired their longer weapons or else stepping back to reload with furious haste.

Behind Calvin, in the little world that was the fort, the sounds were clear and distinct. Between the intermittent snarl of the rifles sounded the restless scrape of feet on rough boards, the lowing of cattle, an officer's sharp command, the cry of a child. Beyond the palisade, in that unreal world where tiny houses burned and minature figures toiled across the fields, there sounded only an intermittent and distant popping of musketry. Then came the brazen voice of a bugle. Like an echo followed the flat note of a Ranger's horn persistently calling.

Shrill yelling broke along the edge of the forest, and the column of Royal Greens swung into action. An uneven line of men advanced at a run with rifles trailing, and whistles trilled sharply along the stockade of the fort. Voices barked commands. The soldiers began to fire by platoon. The parapet swam in smoke, and the regular volleys crashed out like the slow pounding of a giant surf.

Calvin found himself at the nearest loophole, coughing in the smoke, firing at those still distant figures. Green-clad figures began to dot the fields, and the Tories took cover. Now every stump and hummock seemed to bloom with white blossoms as they fired, and the bullets droned overhead or thudded venemously into the logs of the stockade. Part way down the wall, a soldier dropped his musket and staggered back with both hands pressed to his throat. He fell backwards from the firing step to land in the mud below. A woman hurried over to kneel beside him for a moment, then rose to her feet with a sigh and walked slowly away.

The enclosure of the fort was now filled with refugees from the settlement. Lieutenant Spencer's covering detachment trotted back through the gate with Butler's Rangers storming at their heels, and the log portals slammed shut. A woman with haggard eyes clutched Major Woolsey by the arm.

"There's folk still out in those houses!" she screamed. "You can't abandon them like this!"

Woolsey was very pale, and a little muscle in his cheek was twitching as he looked at her.

"They outnumber us eight to one, Madam!" he said hoarsely. "We can only try to hold the fort and save those who are here. The others are beyond our help."

At least a dozen houses were in flames now, and half a score of dusky figures rushed for a cabin a little nearer the fort. A puff of smoke blossomed out from beside the door. The leading Seneca spun half around and then dropped, but others were already battering at the door with hatchets and rifle butts. As the planks splintered they burst inside with a pair of Tories following. The back door of the cabin opened and a girl ran out, followed by a small boy.

After the girl bounded a tall Seneca, the blade of his war hatchet flashing in the sun. The girl's pale hair streamed behind her as she ran. When within half a dozen strides the Seneca hurled his hatchet. A streak of light seemed to dart from his hand toward the fleeing girl, and she fell headlong in mid-stride. For an instant the Indian knelt beside her. Then he stood erect and shook the

The raiders began to stream across the trail, a few paces away.

scalp at the fort in a gesture of defiance. Calvin fired with a curse on his lips and a sob in his throat.

The boy had run for the shelter of a clump of brush, but one of Butler's Rangers caught him. Calvin could see the boy's mouth wide open in terror, though the sound of the scream was lost in the now steady roll of musketry. The Tory drew his knife across the boy's throat, scalped him, and flung the body into a blazing haystack. A dozen militiamen fired together without effect, and one of them cried out in a strangled voice:

"God, these muskets are no good. Can't one of you riflemen reach him?"

Tim Murphy was already sighting his long-barreled Deckhardt, and at that moment he fired. The Tory clutched his breast and went to his knees, and then wilted forward to lie motionless on his face. The big rifleman was quickly reloading, a smile on his lips, though his eyes were blue flakes of ice.

THE sun was fully up at last, and the middle fort was completely invested. The ring of the invaders stretched around it on all sides, ever creeping nearer. The barking scalp yell of the Mohawks rose shrill above the deeper cheering of the Tories. Orders and commands crackled back and forth on the crowded firing step of the fort. Murphy shouted a jest, and a gust of grim laughter ran along the stockade like the rustling of leaves in a wind. As Calvin hurried to a powder keg to refill his horn, he heard the distant boom of three cannon shots. The lanky militiaman beside him snorted in disgust.

"So at last they wake up, there at the upper fort! Much good their warning does us now!"

Calvin stood motionless where he was, one hand dipped in the keg of powder while the other held his rifle. Vaguely he was conscious that sweat was running down into his ears. What had he been thinking of? For the past half hour the savage wine of battle had driven all else from his mind.

Though the raiders had evidently slipped past the watchers at the upper fort during the night, in order to attack this more populous district, they might have begun to ravage the country as soon as they passed the upper stockade. The farm had lain directly in their path! The last of the cobwebs were gone from Calvin's brain now, and he filled his powder horn with careful haste. He must try to reach the farm. At the moment over fifteen hundred Tories and Indians lay between, but he had to get there some way.

Whistles trilled again, the measured volleys merged, and the rifle fire quickened to a steady drum-roll. Mortar shells were bursting within the fort now, while Phil Graft and half a dozen others were hurling buckets of water on one of the barracks that had been set afire by a shell. Calvin looked about him.

Soldiers, militiamen and settlers alike stood shoulder to shoulder along the firing step. Flame-spirts ran from the blackened muzzles of their weapons, and a dun haze of powder smoke hung over the whole fort. One rangy farmer spun half around at his loop-hole and then fell in a crumpled heap with a round blue hole in his forehead. His wife, a gaunt frontier woman, had been coming up to him at that moment with a dipper of water. For an instant she crouched beside the body of her husband, then arose, dry-eyed, and picked up his rifle. She stepped to the loophole he had just quitted. Her short, graying hair tossed on the breeze and lay against the brown stock of the rifle. Time for tears later! Her shoulder jumped to the recoil as she fired.

Huddled bodies lay here and there along the firing step, or in the courtyard below. Blake, his great body strangely shrunken in death, lay with his head in a puddle of muddy water. He had been shot through the temple, and the water was slowly turning crimson. The shacks along the creek were all in flames now, the black smoke of their burning drifting slowly upward in a great cloud.

A Seneca painted in stripes of red and orange ran from one of them with a scalp of long black hair in his hands. Calvin felt the palms of his hands grow moist.

"That must be Lana Tybert's scalp," Phil Graft said in a curiously toneless voice. "No one else in all the middle fort had hair like that."

Calvin was looking for Nate Clark. When he found him near one of the corner bastions, he gripped the forest-runner by the arm.

"Nate!" he said, "I'm going to slip over the stockade and run for it. I've got to get to the farm."

"Man, you're crazy!" There was a smear of blood on Nate's shoulder, slowly dying his fringed buckskin. His eyes were smears of charcoal on white bark. "You'll never get through now. They're attacking on all sides. Wait a little later."

He broke off abruptly and turned back to his loop-hole as renewed yelling from behind the stockade showed that the assault was being pressed home. The garrison were loading and firing so fast their musket barrels were hot to the touch. The brass cannon set in the embrasures roared and thundered, one man thrusting a smouldering slow-match at the touch hole as soon as each piece was loaded, and the crews springing to action again as soon as each gun belched flame and rocked back against the ropes that held it. A heavy woman with her hair all loose and her sleeves rolled up to the elbows was wielding the rammer on the eastern gun. Her face was expressionless, and her blackened arms swung to and fro with an effortless ease.

THE Tory and Indian attack wilted and melted away before the ferocity of the defending fire. Sprawling bodies dotted the fields as the others trotted back to shelter. A wounded ranger tried to crawl back on his hands and knees, but Nate Clark shot him through the head and he lay still. Someone cried out that the Indians were using fire-arrows, and more men went for water buckets.

The firing from the stockade lessened in intensity, and an officer of the Royal Greens started to come forward with a white flag. Immediately Tim Murphy picked up his rifle which he had laid aside to rub his scorched fingers.

"Murphy! Don't fire on that man! He bears a flag of truce!" one of the regular officers shouted as he ran along the firing step. "Hold your fire!"

The big frontiersman looked at him with a twisted smile for a moment, then flung the long rifle to his shoulder. "Morgan's Men recognize no truce!" he muttered as he fired. "I'll kill the dirty son of a slut!"

The Tory's cocked hat flew in the air as Murphy's shot went high. The loyalist officer hesitated, then dropped his white flag and sprinted back for shelter. Yells of derision arose from the militiamen clustered along the parapet.

Their recent repulse had shaken the Tories' enthusiasm for the siege, and they appeared hesitant. In this moment of comparative quiet Calvin Lorton moved unobtrusively toward the back

wall of the stockade. This was his chance. If he could get through the lines and make his way back to the farm at all, it would be now while the besiegers were disorganized. For a moment he stood peering over the stockade, and then looked up to see Nate Clark beside him.

"What are you aiming to do?" the forest-runner asked quietly.

"Drop over the wall here, and go back to the farm through the woods."

"Don't think you'll make it."

"I've got to try." Calvin's voice was tense, and Nate glanced at him sharply. Then he shrugged.

"All right," he said quietly. "I'll go with you. Let's get started."

Twenty minutes later the pair of them crouched in a dense thicket in a willow bottom along the edge of the creek. They had dropped over the rear of the stockade, under the shelter of some shacks that stood so close to the fort that the raiders had been unable to burn them, and had slipped through the ring of besiegers. They were aided by a great confusion in the Tory ranks, a changing of position that marked the end of the attack.

The defense of the middle fort had been too stubborn. The raiders were already withdrawing, resuming their march down the valley where there would be easier prizes than this stubbornly defended stockade. Calvin pressed himself closer to the ground as the motley array began to stream past along the trail a score of paces away.

Cayugas and Senecas stepped by with no sound but a soft padding of moccasins. Their paint gleamed, their shaven heads were thrown forward. The Mohawks followed, light in color and noble in stature, sombre-eyed as though they realized how the sands of their nation were running low. Rifles swung easily at the trail, painted bodies shown in the mottled sunlight, the beaded hatchet sheaths of the Iroquois tapped against their thighs as they walked. A few prisoners trudged among them. One was a young woman, her wrists tied behind with rawhide thongs, her mouth gagged with a strip of buckskin.

Then the Indians passed, and the trail was filled with a welter of men in buff and green. A single horseman rode among them. Calvin knew him for Sir John Johnson. The dishonored baronet's chin was sunk low on his breast, and his heavy face was ashen. A moment later squat Guy Johnson of Guy Park passed in turn, his green tunic black with sweat and open at his corded throat.

Scarlet succeeded green as the one company of British regulars passed, their hobnailed boots thudding on the hard packed trail. Their muskets all sloped at the same angle. Then came Butler's Rangers, the renegades of the border and the scourge of County Tryon, flowing along in their dark tunics like a sable river of flesh and steel. Young Walter Butler led them, with his pale face, and his dull eyes that ever stared into vacancy. Perhaps he had always with him the ghosts of a thousand murdered women and children.

THE three field pieces went by with a rumble and clank. The dust of their passing settled down to dim the brightness of the willow leaves, and then more Iroquois padded along in the rear. The last of the motley array had passed. The one-time landed gentry of County Tryon were again on the move. One more Mohawk passed like a painted wreath, ever looking back over his shoulder, and the dim trail again lay empty in the mottled sunlight that filtered down through the leaves. The pair of watchers in the willow bottom arose and slipped away in the opposite direction.

"Hope we're in time," Nate said as they trotted southward.

"If we're not, I reckon I'm through." Calvin's voice was flat and toneless. "If we're too late, I'll hang on the trail of the Tories and pour lead into them till they get me. Reckon that's the only way I can even the score."

They were nearing the edge of Hal Ransom's north field. Calvin knew it from the way the dogwood was clustered; he had often come here to set twitch-traps in the rabbit runs. As they came to the edge of the clearing, Nate Clark suddenly gripped his elbow and pulled him to the ground.

From where they lay they could see, by cautiously parting the leaves with their hands, the entire clearing that had been Ransom's farm. The flames that still licked at a few half-consumed logs lying amid the ashes of the house were alive, the gray smoke drifting slowly upward had movement, but all else was lifeless and still, except for a few crows dropping down toward the slaughtered cattle! Even the apple orchard had been girdled in the furious vandalism of the raiders, the trees cut around with the narrow ring that was their death warrant.

The pleasant sunlight that lay across the desolated clearing was a hideous mockery.

For the time in which a man might walk five hundred paces Calvin and Nate lay motionless under the berry bushes. The crows were circling down to the clearing, and the staccato drumming of a woodpecker sounded somewhere off to the right. At last Nate pulled the coon-skin cap from his head and wiped his forehead.

"Reckon it's all clear," he said.

The body of Mrs. Ransom lay on the trampled ground a dozen yards from the door. She had been scalped, and the skin hung horribly loose about her face from the sag of the loosened muscles. Calvin averted his eyes. There was no sign of Hal Ransom—his bones probably lay amid the ashes of the cabin. The bodies of the two little boys were hung grotesquely across what remained of the fence. Their throats had been cut, and the dark blood gathered in puddles on the dusty grass below. By nightfall, Calvin knew, the wolves would come. The total of over two thousand deserted farms in Tryon County would have been increased by one more.

To Calvin Lorton the mile of forest that they now traversed toward his own farm seemed endless. They went at a fast walk that at times merged into a trot, but the minutes were long. Every foot of the way was familiar. Here were the cedars where the old bear he had shot last fall had sharpened its claws. There was the patch where Gretchen used to pick blueberries. His chest felt constricted.

AT A sharp hiss from Nate, Calvin stopped short. He saw nothing wrong, but as his eyes followed the forest-runner's pointing finger he saw that a freshly broken dogwood twig lay in the path before them. On hands and knees they crept forward to the edge of a small ravine in the woods ahead. The ground was marshy—but there were no wild ducks among the cat-tails across the ravine as there should have been. Something had frightened them away. Nate put his mouth to Cal's ear and whispered for a moment. As Calvin nodded, his companion crawled noiselessly off to the right.

While he counted to a thousand, Calvin lay where he was without moving. The sweat was again trickling down into his ears. Then he crawled forward to the edge of the ravine, placed his broad brimmed hat on the muzzle of his rifle, and lifted it above the bushes. Nothing happened. If whoever had frightened the ducks away still lay yonder among the cat-tails, he was too wise to be caught by so simple a trick. Calvin lowered his hat, and brought the rifle to his shoulder with the muzzle thrust out through the bushes.

Suddenly the black painted figure of a Cayuga rose up amid the cat-tails, and instantly dropped back again. Calvin fired, but he was too late. With a yell of triumph at having drawn his fire, the Iroquois bounded forward, savage triumph in his eyes. Calvin stood up and clubbed his empty rifle. Unassisted, he would be a poor match for a Cayuga in a hand to hand fight, but he glanced to the right.

Nate Clark's rifle spat its flame-tipped venom through a clump of bracken some yards up the ravine. The Cayuga went sprawling in mid-stride. Even as he fell the tall figure of the forest-runner shot out from the brush. The polished blade of his hatchet flashed down on the shaven skull of the Indian. Lifting the Cayuga's head, he pulled his knife from its sheath. There was a little tearing sound as the scalp came loose. Clark's face seemed carved from hard walnut, and his thin nostrils quivered.

"This was the war-party executioner,"

he said, pointing to the plain black paint that covered the Cayuga from brow to waist.

Dropping on one knee, Nate plunged his hand into the Iroquois' beaded sporran. His strangely grim young face twitched, and his mouth became a thin line. When he withdrew his hand the fingers held a freshly severed scalp. Wordlessly he looked at Calvin.

A black mist descended. There was a distant roaring in Calvin's ears, like spring freshets at the falls of the upper Mohawk. Then he looked again at the scalp. It was a woman's hair, long and dark. Hilda! The days they had played together as children! The crouching forest-runner still looked up at him without a word.

"Yes," said Calvin Lorton, in a voice that seemed to come from somewhere far outside of himself, "yes. Come."

The girdled orchard told its own tale. There had been greater haste here than at the Ransoms, and there had not been time to ruin the other crops. The barn lay in ashes, and some birds were circling around the heat haze that shivered over the embers. One of Butler's Rangers lay sprawled near the cabin door. He was a dark blot on the trampled grass, his sightless eyes turned to the sky.

FOR a fleeting instant an impossible hope came to Calvin as he stared at the cabin. From this side it appeared unharmed. Then they moved around to the front, and saw the shattered and splintered door. A hole had been chopped in one of the window shutters with a hatchet. Most of Calvin's brain seemed numbed, but with a curious detachment he noticed the prints of moccasins in the dust before the door. The bench had been overturned. Then they came to the door and looked inside.

After one glance into the cabin, Nate Clark turned and walked away. He sat down on the ground with his rifle across his knees, and stared into space. Calvin lowered the butt of his rifle to the ground and leaned heavily on the muzzle. His eyes slowly adjusted themselves to the dimness of the cabin's interior.

The minutes passed. Flies buzzed in the sun. A chipmunk chattered noisily in the woods across the clearing. Still Calvin stood where he was—staring. The whole tapestry of the past two days was slowly unrolling within his mind, each incident clear and distinct. The desolation within the cabin was complete. Even the watch-dog lay slain beside the bodies of the children, with his skull cloven by a hatchet stroke. There was no sign of Gretchen at all. When Calvin turned and went out into the sunlight again, his face was like that of an old man.

Nate glanced at him briefly, and then got up and leaned his rifle against the coping of the well.

"I'll help you bury your dead," he said.

"Gretchen. My wife. She isn't there," Calvin said. Nate's eyes widened.

"Not there? I only took one glance, and didn't notice." He snatched up his rifle again.

"If she's a prisoner we've no chance of rescue," Calvin said dully.

"She wasn't among the prisoners we saw!" Nate snapped. "Come on!"

The forest-runner trotted in a wide circle around the rim of the clearing, watching the ground for tracks. Then he wheeled and darted into the underbrush. They had only gone a few hundred yards when they caught a glimpse of calico through the leaves and came to where the hastily retreating Tories had left her. The left side of Gretchen's face was streaked with blood, but the blow of a death-maul intended to kill the abandoned prisoner had only been a glancing one.

"She'll live," Nate said as they laid her on the bed in the cabin a minute later.

Two hours had passed before Calvin and Nate stood beside the cluster of mounds that marked the three graves under the big oak at the edge of the clearing. With the task finished, Nate wiped his hands on his breeches and looked at the body of the dead Ranger.

"I'll stop at the upper fort on my way out and tell them to send a party to bury that man and the people at the next farm," he said. Calvin nodded wordlessly, and Nate looked at him again.

"Your wife can travel in a day or so. Why not leave her at the fort and then come along with me?" he said, "You talked about turning forest-runner yesterday."

"Thanks, but I reckon not," Calvin said slowly.

"Or, why don't you enlist in the army? Tim Murphy told me last night you talked of joining Morgan's Rifles. Your wife'd be safe at the fort."

Calvin's eyes sought the sky beginning to darken above the tree tops to the east. Morgan's Rifles! He thought of close-locked ranks of riflemen swinging forward all together, with the green thrums tossing on sleeves and leggins, closing in on the Red Beast! Then his slow glance came back to the fields about him, and the unharvested crops. He shook his head.

"She'd be safe enough in the Fort, Nate," he said. "But she wouldn't be happy there. Gretchen's notional about this bit of land. We cleared and planted it together, and she reckons it's part of us. Maybe she's right, after all! Anyway, there's a good stand of corn and the crops must be got in. It'll be a light harvest in County Tryon, after this raid. Reckon I'll stay."

The forest-runner hitched up his warbelt, glanced at the priming of his rifle, and dropped the weapon into the hollow of his left arm. There was nothing further to be said. The two men shook hands briefly. The trapper turned and moved off with his lithe stride. The woods swallowed him up, and he was gone.

CALVIN walked slowly back to the cabin. An evening breeze was creeping across the clearing to brush away the last wisps of smoke rising from the ashes of the barn. There was a faint rustling from the cornfield as the long leaves scraped against each other. He inspected the shattered door a moment, saw that it would be the work of only a minute to repair it.

Gretchen was conscious when he came into the cabin, her blue eyes like cornflowers against the white of the bandages that wrapped her head. Cal bent down to take her hand for a moment.

"How're you feeling?"

"A mite peaked," she said. Her troubled glance strayed toward the wet patches where Calvin had washed the blood stains from the floor.

"The others?" she whispered.

"Nate and I buried them. It's all right," he said. Her hand tightened on his fingers, and he sat awkwardly down on the edge of the bed. "Reckon I've been a poor husband in a lot of ways."

"That's all right, Cal," she whispered. "But what about the crops? Did the raiders—?"

"The crops are all right," he said with a sudden grin. "We'll get them in. The army will still have its bread."

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BLACK MASK

This great NOVEMBER issue is on sale NOW.

"A holdup!" cried Hudkins. "Hear that, boys?"

OUTLAW

By FRANK GRUBER

THE Civil War was over, and a great nation, united once more, was healing the scars of battle. But in Kansas and Missouri the hatreds still lived on.

Jim Chapman, ex-guerrilla, one of the men who had ridden with Bloody Bill Anderson, had gone to Mexico after the war. Now, partly disabled from wounds, he was ready to return home and live in peace. But he soon discovered that there was amnesty for defeated soldiers, but none for men who had ridden under the black flag.

He found that many of his former comrades were vainly trying to adjust themselves to the new order of things. Harried by strict Union regulations, distrusted and hated by the neighbors whose homes they had pillaged, they were for the most part beaten and helpless. But a handful of the more spirited had refused to bow down to circumstances and had turned bandits.

Chapman had turned down an offer from Alan Vickers, the famous detective, to become one of his men, because he thought he could take up farming in

his own town. But it only took a few days to show him his error. Surprised by a band of drunken soldiers headed by Jim Pike, a renegade Union officer whom he had thrown off a train for being disorderly, Chapman was severely wounded and his companion was killed. Chapman was charged with the murder.

Evelyn Comstock, the daughter of an influential banker, brought him, wounded, to the secret meeting place of some ex-guerrillas and they nursed him back to health. In the meanwhile, he learned that they were planning to rob a nearby bank in order to get enough funds to start a new life.

Despairing of receiving any justice in his native State and raging at the persecution, Chapman agreed to take part in the holdup.

Part II

BILLY BLIGH and Clark Welker suggested the Comstock Bank in Freedom.

"They'd never figure on the same place being held up again," Bligh argued.

Clem Tancred immediately told what Evelyn Comstock had done for Chapman, and that ruled out the Comstock Bank.

Chapman said: "It ought to be farther away, even though we are heading for Texas. We've all got relatives around here and no telling what they'll do to them, if they know it was our bunch."

"The Richfield Bank's got more money than any around," said Tancred. "And a Yankee owns it. An old Kansas man. Captain Shafter, he calls himself, but I know damn well he was with Jennison at Independence."

The die cast, there remained only the ironing out of the details. Richfield was on the Missouri River. The logical route of escape was south. It was Confederate country. The Yankees were tolerated down there only because they controlled the law. The farther north, the more Unionists. A bank job would be attributed to former Confederates and pursuit would be in a southern direction.

Chapman suggested they head north to the Iowa line, cross it and then work westward to Nebraska and south through Kansas for a final getaway.

"We'll cut the telegraph wire on the south road and they'll be sure we did it to keep them from sending word in that direction. We won't touch the wire on the north road and take our chances."

He flexed his left shoulder. It was still a little stiff, but the ten days' rest since the Freedom affair had healed it so it no longer pained him.

They made camp in the canebrakes in the bottoms a few miles west of Richfield. They did not build a fire, and when morning came, Chapman's shoulder was so stiff he could scarcely raise his left arm. But he did not tell the others about it.

They were pretty sober, anyway.

At the edge of town, they separated, Clem and his brother, Dan, a year and a half younger, riding ahead and Chapman following after a few minutes interval, with Welker and Bligh.

The Tancreds tied their horses at the hitch rail in front of the Richfield postoffice and Chapman led the others past a hundred feet to the Richfield Hotel. They dismounted and fastened the reins about the rail, using slipknots so they could untie them quickly.

Chapman looked at his nickel-plated watch.

"Twelve minutes," he said. "We give them five minutes to open up."

Billy Bligh was tugging nervously at his newly-grown mustache.

"Damn the waiting," he muttered.

"Go inside and buy yourself some cigars," Chapman suggested.

Bligh accepted the suggestion and Chapman and Welker remained outside on the wooden sidewalk, conversing quietly and looking in every direction, but toward the bank, two doors up the street.

After a couple of minutes, Bligh came out of the hotel, with a cold cigar stuck in his mouth. His face was ashen.

"Captain Comstock and his sister are in the hotel," he whispered hoarsely to Chapman. "They were eating breakfast in the dining room and saw me."

"Did you talk to them?"

"No, I made off I didn't see them. Is it off?"

Chapman looked at his watch. It was

three minutes after eight. Up the street, the Tancreds were already moving toward the bank.

"Too late," he said. "Come on."

According to the plan, Clark Welker walked to the horses and mounted his own. Bligh and Chapman moved leisurely toward the bank. Before they reached it, Clem entered and Dan Tancred, pretending to recognize Chapman as an old friend, hailed him.

"Mike Morrison!" he exclaimed, holding out his hand.

Bligh merely nodded to Dan and walked past him to the horses of the Tancreds. Chapman pumped Dan Tancred's hand, then apparently pulled him toward the bank.

They passed inside together and saw Clem Tancred at the tender's window. Clem was saying:

"I'd be obliged, sir, if you could cash this bill for me."

The teller picked up the fifty-dollar note that Clem had laid on the counter and examined it. "Certainly, sir. How would you like it?"

The cashier was to the front of the teller, seated in his railed enclosure, talking to a customer of the bank, an elderly farmer in a linen coat.

Clem reached under his coat and plucked out a Navy Colt. He thrust it at the startled teller. "I'll have it in big bills. Along with all the other bills you've got in the place."

Jim Chapman whipped out his gun and covered the cashier and his customer. "Sorry, gentlemen, but this is a hold-up. If you'll raise your hands no one will be hurt."

"Up with them!" thundered Bligh, bringing out not one, but two revolvers.

The bank cashier was staring at them with bulging eyes. His jaw fell open wide enough to swallow a fist. The farmer, whose back was turned, whirled around and bleated: "Don't shoot me! I've got a family and I voted for George McClellan—"

"No one's going to be hurt," Chapman reassured them. "You, Mr. Cashier, please open your vault." He vaulted the low railing and whipped out a folded wheat sack from under his vest.

He moved toward the rear of the bank, with the frightened cashier. The door of the vault was closed, but not locked. The cashier pulled open the heavy door.

CHAPMAN gestured with his Navy Colt and the man stepped inside and began taking down stacks of currency from a shelf. Chapman tossed him the wheat sack and the cashier stuffed in the money. Finished with the bills, he attacked a tray of silver, but Chapman called him off.

"Too heavy. This will do."

Out in the bank, the teller had prepared all the counter money, under Clem Tancred's persuasion. Chapman scooped it into the sack, then tossed the thing over the wire screen to Tancred.

"All right, Joe," he said.

"Jim!" cried Dan Tancred, from near the door. "Bill's in trouble."

Chapman's eyes darted to the window. Directly outside, Billy Bligh was wrestling with a heavy-set man. Even as he looked the stranger shoved Bligh away from him and groped for his hip.

Bligh sprang forward with clubbed revolver, changed his mind and fired it instead. The big man reeled back.

Chapman swore under his breath.

"Let's go!" he cried.

The Tancreds rushed for the door. Chapman followed, but turned to call back to those in the bank.

"Better not come outside for a minute," he cautioned.

He plunged through the door just as a shotgun roared on the other side of the street. Bligh turned and fired two shots in return, missing the man with the shotgun, but shattering a store window behind him.

The Tancreds ran for their horses and Chapman caught Bligh's arm.

"Come on, you fool!" he snarled.

Clark Welker, astride his horse, began firing coolly up the street, not aiming at anyone, but merely to discourage rash citizenry.

As Chapman and Bligh came abreast of the hotel, the door was kicked outwards and the hotel clerk, an apron about his waist, popped out with a huge Sharp's rifle in his hands. Billy Bligh fired at him, missed and charged the

hotel man, just as the latter brought the rifle to his shoulder.

Chapman groaned, stopped, and threw down with his Colt. The gun bucked his palm and the hotel man cried out, more in terror than pain. The rifle dropped from his hands, hit the step and blasted out a window across the street. The hotel clerk wrapped his hands around his knee and sat down on the steps.

Behind him, Captain Cliff Comstock stepped out of the hotel, a revolver in his hand. He aimed it at Chapman, then seemed to recognize him and hesitated. While he paused, Evelyn Comstock came running out and pushed up her brother's gun hand.

Across a distance of a dozen feet, Chapman's eyes met Evelyn's. He saw fright and loathing in her glance. And then he turned away.

Guns were firing generally up the street now, as merchants fired from their doorways. But their courage was superior to their marksmanship. The Tancreds thundered up on their horses as Chapman swung into the saddle.

Clem Tancred ripped the morning air with the old guerrilla yell. It was instantly taken up by Clark Welker and Billy Bligh.

"Yip-yip-yow-eeee!" It was a blood curdling scream of hate and defiance. The citizens of Richfield remembered it well from the old days, and in the lull of silence that follow the yell, the former guerrillas, turned bank robbers, thundered down the street.

CHAPTER V

MASKED TRAILS

ESCAPE was ridiculously easy. The guerrillas had roamed this country all during the war. They were masters of the art of hiding a trail and they took advantage of every bit of cover and shelter. They could hide with their horses in a scrap of cover while a troop of Federals passed within ten yards of them, without sighting them.

They laid up by day and traveled by night. They forded streams and went two and three days with no more food than a bird would eat.

They preferred traveling in blinding rains when few others would venture out. They dug potatoes from a field and ate them raw and stripped green ears of corn from their stalks.

On the second day after the Richfield bank holdup, Chapman rode boldly into a village just above the Iowa line and bought a newspaper.

The affair was still important news.

"Daring Robbers Steal $40,000 in Daylight Holdup."

That was gross exaggeration. The currency in the wheat sack had totalled only a little more than $15,000—three thousand apiece.

In their bivouac that night, Chapman suggested disbandment, old guerilla strategy.

"They know it was five of us and they'll be looking for that number. We've kept out of sight so far, but as the days go on, we'll get careless. Somebody, somewhere, will look on us with suspicion and get to talking. We'll do better to break up."

"But what about Texas?" asked Clem Tancred.

"Not me!" hooted Billy Bligh. "I'm headin' for St. Louis to have a good time. There's more where this come from and I'm not figurin' on saving for my old age—not yet."

"And you, Clark?" Chapman asked of Welker.

Welker shrugged. "I got an uncle in Kentucky, I figure to pay him a visit."

Clem Tancred groaned. "I'm still going to Texas with Dan and give that cattle stuff a whirl. You coming along, Jim?"

Chapman thought of the fifteen hundred mile overland trip. It would mean six weeks of strenuous riding. The last couple of nights of traveling had made his shoulder so sore he could scarcely move his left arm.

He shook his head. "I think I'd like to take things easy for awhile."

"Where? You can't go back to Freedom. They don't mention our names in that paper, but they'll get around to it after awhile. It wouldn't be safe."

"I'm not going back to Freedom. I

think I'll—" he glanced at Billy Bligh. "I think I'll travel up to Minnesota for awhile. It's cool up there in summer."

They separated that night, with more or less vague instructions for communicating with one another, at a later date.

Chapman sold his horse the following day to a blacksmith in a small village, for about one-third of what the animal was actually worth. He traveled by stagecoach to Burlington and there bought a ticket on the train to Chicago.

CHICAGO was a yawning metropolis. Thirty years an incorporated city, it was already rivalling St. Louis in population. In bustle it had surpassed it even before the war.

There were blocks and blocks of stores, separated by chasms of mud or dust, depending on the weather, that were designated as streets. In places, the wooden sidewalks, built in a more or less uniform level, were four feet above the streets. It was a city of lumber and tarpaper. There were fewer brick buildings than in any metropolis of half its size. In four years more a fire would sweep through the flimsy city and in it's ashes would rise a permanent city of brick and stone, larger and more substantial.

Chapman rented a room at the Palmer House. His rough clothing, wrinkled and splattered with dried mud, was not too conspicuous. There were men here from the plains. You saw them now and then walking down the street, wearing buckskin. Cowboys from Texas clumped along the boardwalks.

Chapman went the first day of his stay in Chicago and bought an entire new outfit, Prince Albert coat with a small velvet collar, brocaded black silk vest, grey striped trousers and fine calfskin boots. He compromised, however, on a flat-crowned felt hat, rather than wear a derby or silk hat.

He bought a vest three sizes too large for him and under it strapped his broad leather belt, in which he carried his Navy Colt.

Having bought his finery, he spent the next week in his hotel room, sleeping and resting. He went out only for brief walks, during which time he bought newspapers and a book or two, which he read from cover to cover in his hotel room.

In the second week, the inactivity began to pall on him and he began to go about the city. At a livery stable, he rented a hack and a fast trotter and drove north across the river to the Old Kinzie House. The prairie began just beyond but for another mile the countryside was dotted with realtors' signs, who advertised—somewhat hopefully, it seemed to Chapman—that Chicago was growing and would soon be spreading out here to Lake View.

Another day he drove out to the site of Fort Dearborn and poked among the old ruins. The third day he drove west to Goose Island and spent an interesting hour talking to a man who made his living trapping muskrats.

Before the end of the second week, he took to spending hours in the bar of the Palmer House, sipping at glasses of cool beer. He liked to lean against the bar and listen to the commercial drummers tell tall stories. He bought an occasional drink for barroom acquaintances and accepted some from others.

One of these, a cadaverous-looking man with a sallow skin and soft, white hands, came into the bar every afternoon and spent two or three hours there, although he seldom drank more than two glasses of whiskey.

During their third conversation, the stranger introduced himself to Chapman. "My name is Philip Castlemon. I'm in the wheat business."

Chapman had already considered the matter of names and he gave one he had selected for such a contingency—the one with which he had signed the hotel register. "I'm James Blake. I'm newly arrived from California."

"California? Ah, you weren't in the war?"

"I'm sorry to say I wasn't."

"You didn't miss anything." Castlemon tapped his chest. "Eighteen months in Libby. It didn't help my lungs any."

"I've heard of Libby Prison," said Chapman. "I was laid up on my back a spell. A bullet in a mining camp."

Castlemon's eyes lit up. "Gold, sir? A fascinating metal. I contemplated a bit of prospecting myself at one time. Too rigorous. However, you must come down to the Board of Trade with me some day. I'll wager you'll find it almost as interesting as a mining camp."

"I don't understand. Didn't you say wheat, sir?"

Castlemon chuckled. "Yes. But I don't raise it. I merely speculate in it. The market's rather dull this week, so I haven't been spending much time on the Street. Would you like to do down with me? We can still catch an hour or so of it?"

"Why, I think it might be very interesting. If you're sure I'm not putting you out—"

"Not at all. I really should go down there and give some instructions to my pit man."

TOGETHER they left the hotel and Castlemon signalled to a hansom cab. After a short ride through the dusty streets they dismounted before an imposing edifice on LaSalle Street. Castlemon nodded to a man at the door and they went in.

The scene that greeted Chapman's eyes caused him to blink. It was one of wildest confusion. In two or three clumps on the big floor throngs of men were yelling at the top of their voices, all the while they gesticulated and milled about.

"The pits," Castlemon explained. "The one with the biggest crowd is the wheat. Then there's the oat pit yonder, the corn over there and the smallest one for provisions. Wheat gets the biggest play here."

"But what are they yelling about? Some of them look pretty excited."

"They are. Did you hear that old fellow with the white goatee? He said, 'Sell 100 bids May wheat at 57¾.' That means he wants to sell a hundred bids at 57 and three-quarter cents a bushel. A bid consists of five thousand bushels."

"What?" exclaimed Chapman. "He wants to sell a half million bushels of wheat? Where did he get all that wheat?"

"Oh, he doesn't own it. No one actually owns the wheat they buy and sell here. They merely deal in futures. Let's say you want to buy a hundred bushels of wheat on a one point margin. You pay one hundred dollars for that. If the price goes up a point you earn a hundred dollars. It it goes down a point you lose the hundred."

Chapman looked blank for a moment. Then he exclaimed. "Why, that's plain gambling!"

"Of course! No one said it wasn't. The big operators buy on a wider margin. Ten, even fifteen points. Three or four of them get together and form a pool. They buy as much wheat as they can. Then they run the price up. Pretty soon they own all the wheat in sight. In a case like that, not a barrel leaves a warehouse or elevator except at whatever price they set. When the wheat's cornered, there's a scramble. Everyone wants to buy. Then suddenly, the big fellows dump it on the market. They bet wheat will go low, and clean up that way too."

"What happens when they corner the wheat and run the price up?"

"Then you pay two cents more for a loaf of bread."

Chapman looked thoughtfully at Castlemon. Then he shook his head. "It sounds like a dirty business."

"You never said a truer word, Mr. Blake. Every time I make a thousand dollars here I know I'm stealing it from someone. But that's life. The Confederates stole several years of my life. It all evens up in the end."

"Perhaps it does," Chapman said soberly.

"I'll show you how this works. Yesterday I bought some wheat at 58. It's selling right now at 57¾. Watch what happens." He led Chapman to a small booth where a man with an eye shade and rolled-up sleeves was scribbling on a pad of paper.

"Hello, John," he greeted the man. "Sell a thousand bids of May wheat for me."

"Any price, Mr. Castlemon?"

"Fifty-seven— No, change that. Sell a thousand bids at 56¾."

"Right!" The clerk tore off a slip of

Chapman groaned, stopped and threw down with his Colt.

paper and waved it at a messenger boy who was hovering nearby. The boy rushed madly to the pit, searched around a moment in the milling throng, then thrust the paper into a man's hand. The recipient of the paper glanced at it and crumpled it into a pocket.

Then he held up his fist, thumb pointing down.

He turned and attacked the throng and for a moment or two it seemed to Chapman that the shouting increased in tempo. Then the man emerged from the crowd and made a signal grinning widely.

Castlemon smiled. "Well, I just made twelve hundred and fifty dollars, Mr. Blake."

"But you sold at a lower price than you bought!"

"Of course. I always do. I'm a bear. A bull plays the rising market. I seldom do. So that makes me a bear. Shall we return now to the hotel and celebrate my good fortune?" His mouth twisted sardonically.

And Jim Chapman had thrust his gun into a man's face and become an outlaw, for three thousand dollars. He thought about that as he rode back to the Palmer House with the cheerful Philip Castlemon.

THEY had dinner together that evening in the ornate hotel dining room. Chapman had never seen so many well-dressed women in his life, but despite their finery, there was no woman in the room as beautiful as Evelyn Comstock. He frowned as he made the mental comparison.

After dinner, Castlemon met a couple of his friends in the hotel lobby. He introduced Chapman as from California and after a few minutes of conversation one of the men asked Chapman if he ever played poker. Chapman admitted that he did.

"Why don't you and Phil come along, then?" the man asked. "We're on our way to enjoy a little game now."

Castlemon looked at Chapman. "What do you say, Mr. Blake?"

"Well, I haven't played much lately, but I don't mind sitting in. Provided you gentlemen remember that *I'm* not in the wheat business."

Castlemon chuckled. "If that's all that's worrying you, I'll cut you in on a small deal tomorrow. I've been watching the weather reports. It's been raining in Iowa."

"What does that mean?"

Castlemon moved his thumb up and down. "They've had virtually a drought out there and it's held the price of wheat up unseasonably. I think it'll drop two points tomorrow when it becomes known that it's raining in Iowa."

By this time the quartet had adjourned to the sidewalk and engaged a hansom cab. They drove north across the river and after a block or two the cab stopped before a handsome white-pillared house on State Street.

"Watch Al's game, Mr. Blake," Castlemon cautioned jokingly. "He draws to inside straights."

CHAPTER VI

MAN TRACKER

A BUTLER opened the door for them and a heavy-set man in his early forties came forward and greeted them enthusiastically.

A shock stiffened Jim Chapman. Their host was Alan Vickers, the detective. For a moment, he fought down an impulse to turn and dash out of the house. But then it was too late. Castlemon was introducing him and Vickers held out a muscular hand.

"Mr. Blake of California? Glad to make your acquaintance. . . ." He blinked at Chapman. "Haven't I met you somewhere?"

"That pleasure has been denied me," Chapman said stiffly. "I've only just come to Chicago this week."

"I know, but somewhere else. I get around a lot. I almost never forget a face, yet—" He smiled suddenly and turned briskly to lead them into a card room, where a table and chairs had already been arranged.

"A drink, gentlemen? Wilton, the port!"

Castlemon and one of the others immediately peeled off their coats.

"Clearing the deck for action," Harvey Sutton declared.

"Go ahead. I always play better in my shirt sleeves myself," Alan Vickers said.

Chapman looked frostily at Alan Vickers, then deliberately peeled off his Prince Albert and unbuttoned his extra-size vest.

He tapped the broad leather belt that was exposed under the vest.

"I'm sorry. A wretched California habit."

Castlemon regarded him in shocked surprise. "You mean you've been carrying around that young cannon all this hot day?"

"At home a man's undressed without one." Chapman unbuckled the belt and wrapped it around the holster in which reposed the big Navy Colt.

Harvey Sutton winced as he sized up the gun. "Aren't you afraid that thing'll go off on you some time?"

Chapman shook his head and smiled. He hung the outfit on the coat rack with his Prince Albert. Then he took his place at the poker table.

Vickers brought out several packs of cards and seated himself. "I'm going to give you a run for your money tonight, boys. I just opened a new branch in

They were masters of the art of hiding a trail. . . .

Missouri and I've a hunch it's going to do mighty well for the agency."

Pomeroy grimaced. "Missouri. That's among the rebels, isn't it?"

Vickers laughed. "The war's over, Elton. There are more people in Missouri than there are in Illinois. They had it pretty tough there and Missourians in general are content to take things easy these days."

"Easy?" exclaimed Castlemon. "What about all those bank robberies they've been having down there?"

"There've only been two. And I don't think there'll be any more. They caught one of the bandits and they'll soon have the others."

"Who caught the bandit, Al?" Pomeroy asked.

"A man from my St. Louis office. He picked him up in St. Louis. It seems this bandit was trying to drink St. Louis dry and became a little careless in his

talk. He turned out to be a former Confederate, a man named Bligh."

Bligh, the poor, loud-mouthed fool.

CHAPMAN said: "Well, shall we begin, gentlemen?" And thought: "He's playing with me. He recognized me and knows that I was one of the men at Richfield."

Vickers said, "I suppose it'll be the usual draw? But since you're new in our game, Mr. Blake, suppose you suggest the limit?"

Chapman shrugged. "What do you usually play?"

Castlemon answered. "We'll forget that this evening. Since you're my guest, we'll play whatever you wish. Five dollars, say?"

Chapman inhaled softly. "Well, gentlemen, five dollars is all right with me. Back home in California they generally play the sky, but as for myself—"

"The sky!" exclaimed Pomeroy. "Swell. I don't like a limit game myself. Hurts a man's initiative, I always did say."

"Table stakes, then," suggested Vickers. "Your usual stack, Elton?"

"For the beginning, yes. Two thousand."

A tiny frown creased Chapman's forehead. This *was* fast company. He laughed and said: "I didn't know I was going to play tonight, so I didn't stop at the bank. But—I'll begin with twenty-five hundred."

He knew that he had less than twenty-six hundred altogether. He brought the money out and shoved it carelessly across the table. Vickers counted it and pushed back seventy-eight dollars. "Hold on to the change, Mr. Blake."

Castlemon contented himself with two thousand dollars worth of chips, but Howard Sutton plunged to the extent of three thousand. He also won the deal and promptly anted up ten dollars. The others followed suit.

"Jacks or better," Sutton announced.

Vickers looked at his cards and promptly passed. Pomeroy squeezed his cards, scowled and opened the pot for twenty-five dollars. Castlemon stayed. Chapman tossed in a red chip and followed it with a blue. "I'll have to raise that, gentlemen!"

All eyes came to him. He smiled.

Sutton looked over his cards and called. Vickers dropped out and the raise came around to Pomeroy. He scowled fearfully at his cards.

"I've only got a pair of jacks, my openers, but I always win the first pot, so—I'll just have to call that and kick it up five hundred, Mr. Blake."

Chapman skinned his cards again, although he knew very well that he had merely a pair of fours. Then he nodded. Castleman at his right, sighed and tossed in his cards.

Chapman counted out five blues and put five more with them. "My dad always told me to call every bet."

Faced with the necessity of adding another thousand dollars to what he had already invested in an uncertain pot, Sutton threw in his hand.

Pomeroy called Chapman. "So you *are* a gold miner." he remarked.

He called for three cards. Sutton glanced inquiringly at Chapman. He smiled. "I like the cards I've got."

Pomeroy exclaimed. "On the first hand?"

"I might not get them again all evening. That's the way it goes. You opened, Mr. Pomeroy."

Pomeroy looked at his cards. "To tell you the truth, I caught another jack. But I'm not going to bet them."

Chapman counted his chips, thirteen hundred and seventy-five dollars worth. He shoved them to the center of the table. "My table stakes, Mr. Pomeroy."

Pomeroy moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. "You mean that?"

"I'm afraid I do."

Pomeroy shook his head. "We're gentlemen, Mr. Blake, but I'm going to ask an ungentlemanly favor. To satisfy my unnatural curiosity—even if I don't call you, will you show me your hand?"

"Whoa!" exclaimed Alan Vickers. "You can't do that, Elton!"

Pomeroy twisted his face comically. "You want me to lose sleep for weeks worrying about whether or not I got bluffed?"

Don't show him, Blake," said Castlemon. "He's foreclosed on so many peo-

ple, he ought to pay for any favor that's given *him*."

"Ah," said Chapman, "you're a banker, Mr. Pomeroy. In that case I'll show you. If you don't call."

Pomeroy looked at his cards once more to assure himself that he couldn't squeeze out a fourth jack. Then he tossed them down. "All right, you win."

Chapman spread out his cards, face up.

Pomeroy's face flooded with hot blood. "Why, damn you, Mr. Blake—"

The others exclaimed to cover up Pomeroy's thinly veiled insult. "He bluffed a banker!" cried Sutton.

Alan Vickers shook his head in admiration. "You have the face for it, Blake. I was convinced you had a straight at the very least."

"I figured four of a kind," Castlemon said. "Come now, Pomeroy, what did you think he had?"

Pomeroy forced a belated laugh, but his lips were still twitching. "A full house at least—"

That was the biggest pot for an hour. Chapman didn't try another bluff, for he knew that he would be called. He played his cards closely. They were good players, all of the others, particularly Castlemon. Chapman had expected that. Any man who could risk a thousand dollars in the wheat pit on the gesture of a thumb had to be a good poker player. Vickers, too, played a stiff game, betting them when he had them. His only weakness was, as Castlemon had told Chapman earlier, a bad habit of drawing to inside straights. Those foolish ventures kept Vickers' stack of chips down.

Sutton played well, but drew bad cards. Pomeroy got fairly good hands, but bet recklessly at times, trying to recoup his early losses. As a result, he soon had to buy a new stack of chips, giving Vickers his check for them.

CHAPMAN on a little more during the first hour of play and in the second hour, won two rather large pots, which brought his total winnings up to nearly four thousand dollars. They had a round of drinks then and the butler brought sandwiches.

Chapman lost a thousand dollars during the next hour and when they decided to quit was three thousand dollars ahead. With their coats already on to leave, Pomeroy, who was the heaviest loser, irritably asked the others to cut high card for a thousand dollars.

Vickers demurred. "You know I don't like cutting, Elton."

"You're ahead, aren't you?" Pomeroy snapped irritably.

Vickers glowered at Pomeroy. "All right, then, count me in."

Sutton who had the alibi of having lost money, refused. Castlemon, however, put in his thousand dollars and Chapman, as the big winner, naturally put up his own.

Pomeroy shuffled the cards quickly and slapped the deck down for Chapman to make the first cut. Chapman took hold of the deck and a little ripple ran through him as his sensitive fingers felt the roughened card. Someone—Pomeroy undoubtedly, since he had forced the cut on the others—had raked the card with his finger nail. It was three-fourths of the way down the pack, so the first cutters would naturally not cut it.

Chapman hesitated. Then he picked up the top part of the deck, all the way down to the roughed card. He apologized instantly. "Gosh, I took most of the deck!"

Pomeroy's eyes were glaring at him. The others cut easily, leaving a few cards for Pomeroy. The banker was black in the face by that time.

Chapman turned up his cards.

"Ace," he said, without looking down.

"You are lucky tonight," said Castlemon, turning up a four. Vickers showed a ten spot and Pomeroy, exposing his card last, turned up a king with an exclamation of disgust.

Vickers' butler had summoned two hansom cabs, since Sutton and Pomeroy were going direct to their homes on the north side and the others were going downtown. At the last moment, when they were at the door, Vickers said carelessly:

"Say, I almost forgot. I promised to look in at the office before turning in. The boys are working on a small case.

Mind if I ride down with you, Castlemon?"

"Not at all. Hop in."

Chapman had half suspected that Vickers was not going to let him walk out of the house.

As they rode across the bridge into the loop, Vickers said, "Pomeroy's a poor loser. I don't think I'll invite him up to play any more."

Castlemon chuckled. "Take him once or twice more and he'll be absconding with the bank's money. I think I'll change my account to the Wheat Exchange tomorrow."

Vickers chuckled. "Are you staying long in Chicago, Mr. Blake?"

"No," Chapman replied. "I'm planning to go on to New York."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Blake," said Castlemon. "I was hoping to get you interested in a wheat deal or two."

"Oh, I'm not going to stay in New York. I'm coming back this way. In fact, I was sort of counting on what you promised me earlier in the evening —to take me down tomorrow for a little flier."

"Fine! Maybe you can double that money you won tonight."

"Something on, Phil?" Vickers asked. "Count me in for a piece of it."

"Sure, why not?"

The hansom cab pulled up at the hotel and the three men climbed out.

"How about a nightcap?" Vickers suggested.

"A good idea," Chapman agreed.

Castlemon was willing and they entered the hotel and moved toward the saloon door. As they approached it, Chapman exclaimed:

"I'll join you in a second! I just want to ask at the desk if the jeweler left my watch."

He turned and without looking back, walked toward the desk. He wondered if Vickers was waiting at the door of the saloon, to watch him, but he forced himself to keep his eyes straight ahead and deliberately went past the desk to a door, opening on Monroe Street. He went through.

Vickers did not call to him.

He stepped down from the sidewalk on Monroe, crossed the street and turned the corner on State Street. He quickened his pace, then.

IT was flight again. But this time Chapman was wearing a gentleman's Prince Albert, broadcloth trousers and white ruffled shirt. He as a conspicuous person to be traveling afar from a city, especially in a country that he did not know.

He had no alternative.

He walked steadily west and northward, through the darkened streets and after awhile came to the river. He recalled then the muskrat trapper on Goose Island; grinning crookedly, he made his way toward the tiny shack made from old packing boxes and driftwood washed ashore by the river.

The trapper was asleep, rolled up in torn blankets, but Chapman roused him. He was astonished when he recognized Chapman.

"Why, Mr. Blake, what're you doin' here at this time o' night?"

"I'm in a little trouble," Chapman exclaimed. "A bit of a fight. The man's got friends and—well, I've got to get away in a hurry. What's the best and quickest way to get west, if you don't want to be seen?"

The trapper gestured to the river. "That way, Mr. Blake. Swiggins, a friend o' mine, will take you in a canoe. He'll take you as far as he can go, then you can cross to the Illinois River and float down to the Missipp'."

"Fine. You can keep your mouth shut?" Chapman took bills from his pocket. "Here's two hundred dollars—"

The trapper gasped. "Why, that's more'n I make in a year trappin' rats!"

"All right. I need some clothes. These are too conspicuous."

The trapper's face fell. "All I got besides those I wear is an old pair of britches and a shirt that's pretty far gone."

"They'll do." Chapman began peeling off his Prince Albert. The flowered vest followed, then the cartridge belt and Navy Colt. The trapper looked at the big gun, but made no comment. A few minutes later Chapman was dressed in the filthy trapper's outfit.

A quarter mile up the island, the trapper roused Swiggins, the boatman, and explained Chapman's predicament. Swiggins was quite agreeable and in a few minutes they shoved off.

At Ottawa, the next afternoon, Chapman gave Swiggins some money and sent him into the village to buy a newspaper, some food and clothing that was not quite as disreputable as what he was wearing.

They got into the canoe again when Swiggins returned.

Kneeling in the bow, Chapman perused the copy of the *Chicago Tribune* that Swiggins had purchased for him. He was vaguely disappointed not to find mention of himself in the paper. He might have found some clue as to Vickers' intentions in a statement, but it was missing.

On an inside page, however, he found something else of interest.

BANK ROBBER ATTEMPTS ESCAPE, IS KILLED.

Bligh, the bank robber arrested early this week was shot and killed today by Sheriff Gregg of Clay County. Sheriff Gregg who had come from Clay County with extradition papers, was returning with his prisoner, when Bligh, according to Sheriff Gregg's statement, made a desperate effort to escape. He plunged from a moving train. Keen disappointment was expressed in the prisoner's death, for it had been hoped that he would implicate the other members of the band which have terrorized the banks of the state. . . ."

Chapman tore the paper across and dropped it into the water. Poor, foolish Bligh; he had redeemed himself for his recklessness. In Clay County they would have done things to Billy. He would have told the names of his companions. Rather than give his friends away, Billy had taken the desperate way out.

CHAPTER VII

BOOM TOWN

ABILENE, KANSAS had been a hamlet of a dozen mud-roofed huts spread over a half mile of prairie. The Kansas Pacific had considered Abilene of such little importance that it had disdained to put up a railroad station at the point, despite the fact that Abilene was the county seat of Dickinson County.

In August, Joseph McCoy, an Illinois man with vision, had selected Abilene as the logical point on the railroad to which Texas cattle should be brought for shipping to the eastern markets. He had so much faith in his judgment that he built at his own expense shipping yards that would have been large for a town one thousand times the size of Abilene. He also began construction of an elaborate hotel for the expected drovers. Not content, then, to wait for wandering herds, the same visionary sent scouts down into the Indian territory to locate them and persuade the drovers to come to Abilene.

The first herd arrived in September. Overnight Abilene became a boom town, the first city of the Kansas plains. Where they came from then, no one knew, but suddenly they descended upon Abilene in hordes—saloon men, gamblers, ladies of the evening, storekeepers and all the parasites without which no real boom town seems to thrive.

The drovers came too, and with them hordes of lean, tanned Texas cowboys, who had driven the herds up from the Texas plains. They were wild men, the cowboys. They had spent weeks on the lonely trail, living on a diet of fresh beef and coffee made from muddy, stagnant water.

Chapman rode into Abilene at high noon, a time that should have been the quietest part of the day. He found Abilene running at full blast. There was only a short street of false fronted buildings, facing the railroad tracks, but at least a hundred cowponies were tied at the hitchrails. The strip of earth between the rails and the buildings that served in place of sidewalks was jammed with moving humanity. It was a madhouse.

He found a place for his horse in front of the Cattleman's Barber Shop and went inside. He had to wait a half hour before one of the four barbers was free. He got a haircut and a shave then, in-

structing the barber to leave the week-old mustache on his upper lip. Glancing in the mirror as he paid, he scarcely recognized himself. He had put on weight these last few weeks and the pallor had gone from his skin. The mustache made him look several years older. Which reminded him that he had passed his twenty-first birthday. He would easily pass for thirty.

He got his horse at the hitchrail and led it to the big livery stable at the end of the street. Then he walked back to the largest building in the block, a two-story frame building, over which was a newly painted sign: *Cattle Driver's Hotel & Bar.*

The building, unpainted and of green lumber, would have half inch cracks after a few weeks.

He went inside. There was a tiny lobby with a counter and a pimple-faced stripling on guard.

"I'd like a room," Chapman said to the youth.

"Day, week or month?"

"How much is it by the day?"

"Five dollars."

Chapman grunted. "I said by the day."

"That's right, five dollars a day. Thirty a week. And you better rent it now, because we're always sold out by supper-time."

"All right. I'll take it for a week. Give me the key."

"There ain't no key. There's a bolt on the inside. Lock it when you go to sleep. Number 4, at the head of the stairs. What's your name? I got to register you."

"James Castlemon." Chapman's mouth twitched as he gave the name of his recent acquaintance in Chicago. There was no chance of the city-bred wheat speculator coming out here to the frontier.

The youth wrote in a ledger, then straightened and got ready for a friendly chat. "Drover, Mr. Castlemon? Maybe you're looking for some fun, huh?"

"Perhaps."

"Why don't you go over to the Bull's Head? Two doors up the street. The whiskey's the best in town."

Chapman nodded to the bar, opening off the lobby to the left. "You have a bar here."

"Sure, if it's just liquor you want. We ain't got no gals here. Boss won't allow it. But you go over to the Bull's Head and asked for Tessie. Tell her I sent you."

"Lester!"

The clerk winced and quickly pretended to be looking for something on a littered table behind the counter.

A WOMAN in a green velvet dress came down the stairs and nodded coolly to Chapman.

"How do you do, sir," she said. "I am Mrs. Vivian Braddock, the landlady."

Chapman scarcely controlled a blink of surprise. Mrs. Braddock was certainly no more than twenty-two and looked even younger than that. She was rather tall and slender, with clear, slightly tanned complexion and hair the color of burnished copper. It was piled high on her head, with a coil nestling on the nape of her neck.

She wore a dark velvet dress, with a white collar and cuffs.

Chapman swept off his hat and bowed. "How do you do, Madam. I—my name is Castlemon. I've just registered, to stay for a time."

"We're glad to have you with us," Mrs. Braddock said in a dignified tone. "I hope, however, that you do not get the wrong impression. We most certainly are not steerers for the Bull's Head, regardless—" She glanced severely at her youthful clerk—"of any impression our employees may create."

Chapman smiled. "I understand, Mrs. Braddock. Thank you."

Mrs. Braddock nodded. "If it is refreshments, my husband will be glad to serve you in the barroom."

Chapman bowed again and turned to the bar. He looked with interest at the two bartenders behind the long bar that ran down one side of the room and wondered which of the two was Mr. Braddock.

One was bald and over fifty, the other was considerably younger, but weighed well over 200 pounds. Chapman decided that the fat man was the husband and

"He bluffed a banker!"

then a lean, sardonic-eyed man at the front of the bar spoke to him.

"How do you do, stranger. I'm Wes Braddock, the proprietor. Will you honor me by having a drink with me?"

He was about thirty, dressed in a black Prince Albert and stovepipe hat. His hands were long and soft, betraying his real vocation, gambling.

Chapman introduced himself by his new name. "Yes, I'll be glad to drink with you, sir."

A bartender brought whiskey and glasses. Braddock tossed off his glass in a single gulp and immediately filled it again. He looked pointedly at Chapman's glass, but the latter smiled and showed that it was still half filled.

"Just up from Texas?" Braddock asked.

"Yes, but I didn't bring a herd. I'm here merely to size up the situation. This is all so new. . . ."

"You're telling me! But it's the biggest thing the West ever saw. Would you believe that a thousand cars of steers have already gone out of Abilene in a single month? Why, next year there'll be a half million head of cattle come to this town. And there'll be buyers here from as far as Pittsburgh, maybe even the Atlantic coast."

Chapman nodded. "They need this beef. But the question is, how much of this beef can the East absorb?"

"A million head!" declared Braddock. "And there'll be at least half that many come to this town next year. Joe McCoy sure started something when he located his shipping pens here. But it'll be the first herds that bring the best prices, steers that have been fattened over the winter right here at Abilene."

"You mean," said Chapman, "that some of the drovers are going to hold their herds here all winter?"

"The far-sighted ones. The steers get pretty thin on the trip up here and the buyers are not too keen to pay high prices for them. But they're offering a premium for fat steers. I don't mind telling you that I'm doing a little speculating myself. I've bought me a thousand steers right now and I'm going to fatten them right here at Abilene and sell them to the first buyers that come along in the spring. I only wish I could afford to buy another thousand head. There's a drover here with a herd—" He stopped and twirled his empty glass. "I'm sorry, I let my enthusiasm run away with me."

"Not at all," said Chapman. "That's why I'm in Abilene, to size up the cattle

business. Frankly, I'm interested in making a profit on cattle, and—"

Braddock reached out and caught Chapman's arm. "Then, sir, let me give you a tip. Since I'm strapped myself, I can't avail myself to it and I may as well pass it on. Mose Hendricks is the man to see. He's staying right here at the hotel and he's got the finest herd you ever laid your eyes on. A little thin right now, as is to be expected after their long journey, but all choice, big steers that'll double in value over the winter."

"I'd like to meet Mr. Hendricks some time."

"You shall!" exclaimed Braddock. "And right now. He went up to his room only fifteen minutes ago, to take a nap. I'll go—"

"No hurry, Mr. Braddock. I've just got here, and—"

"It's no trouble. He'll be glad to talk to you. I'll get him." Braddock hurried out of the saloon.

CHAPMAN drank the rest of his whiskey and scowled at the empty glass. There must be something about him that inspired the confidence of glib salesmen. He'd had no intention whatever of getting into anything like this and it had been only too apparent to him that Braddock was angling for a commission on a deal, yet he'd encouraged the man and now he was in for it. Well, the best he could do was buy a round or two of drinks and evade the issue as best he could.

"Mr. Castlemon," exclaimed Braddock, returning, "I want you to shake the hand of my friend, Mose Hendricks."

Chapman turned from the bar and held out his hand to Clem Tancred; big Clem Tancred with a beard. "It's a pleasure, Mr. Hen—" he began and then Clem roared:

"Jim, you son-of-a-gun!"

Wes Braddock's eyes darted from Chapman to Tancred. "Say, you gentlemen know each other?"

Clem gripped Chapman's hand in a grip of iron and pounded his back with his free hand. "Cripes, Jim, how'd you know I was here?"

"I didn't," said Chapman, shaking his head. "I didn't dream I'd run into you here. I thought you'd be down in Texas by now."

Clem Tancred chuckled. Then he put his left hand under Braddock's arm and his right under Chapman's. He led them away from the bar.

"Braddock," he said in a hoarse whisper. "This is Jim Chapman."

Braddock inhaled softly. "And I took you for a cattle drover! I must be getting simple-minded. And you led me on. What the devil was the idea, Chapman?"

"I was interested. After all, if there's money to be made in cattle—"

"Huh!" cried Clem. "You mean you still got some money left, Jim?"

Chapman shrugged "More than I had before. I had a bit of luck."

"What? You pulled a job by yourself?"

Chapman looked so steadily at Clem Tancred that the big man flushed. "It's all right, Jim. Braddock knows. Matter of fact, we're together in a little business here."

"Cattle business," Braddock corrected. "And we really do have a herd. All we need is some additional capital to carry it over the winter."

Chapman glanced at Clem for verification. Clem nodded. "Dan and me bought the herd. Dan's out with it now. Gosh, he'll be glad to see you. We didn't have quite enough money to swing the deal, so we cut Braddock in on it. We stand to make a pile of money in the spring if we can raise five thousand somewhere to feed the stock over the winter. We got to buy hay and some corn."

"I've got five thousand dollars."

"Whew!" sighed Clem Tancred in relief. "I was afraid we'd have to—uh, I was afraid we'd lose the herd."

"When do you need the money?"

"Right now," said Braddock. "The grass is pretty near gone and if we want to get any hay without having to haul it a hundred miles we'll have to buy it now. We'll need at least a thousand tons."

Chapman dug into his pockets and brought out two fat rolls. He counted

"It's the biggest thing the West ever saw!"

off the money and put the rest away. Braddock's eyes followed the remainder of the money to Chapman's pocket.

Chapman shoved the money to Clem.

"You're in for a third, Jim," Clem said. "Me and Dan have a third together and Braddock has a third. The herd cost us just under ten thousand. We'll sell it for thirty in the spring."

"Perhaps a little more," said Braddock. "Shall I see Schneider about that hay?"

TANCRED tossed the money to Braddock. "Might as well. He promised he wouldn't sell to anyone else for a couple of days, but you can't trust a Dutchman."

"You can't," said Braddock, getting up. "I'm glad you came to Abilene, Chapman. We may work out some interesting propositions." He walked out of the saloon.

"Great chap, Braddock," said Clem.

Chapman looked thoughtfully at Clem for a moment. Then he said, suddenly: "Have you heard about Billy Bligh?"

Clem's eyes remained blank. "No. He left us in Iowa to go to St. Louis."

"He's dead. He went to St. Louis and talked too much to strangers."

Clem exclaimed, then suddenly his face turned red. "You mean—Braddock?"

Chapman nodded.

"But it's all right here, Jim. This is Kansas. Hell, there's no law out here. Two men were killed on the street yesterday. There isn't an evening some one doesn't get shot. This is hell, with the lid off. And Braddock's the hottest man in this town."

"I met his wife a few minutes ago. Is she aware of her husband's business deals?"

Clem laughed. "She's a honey, isn't she? But don't be fooled by her looks, Jim. She's plenty hard. As far as I know she thinks my name is Hendricks,

but—" Clem shrugged. "How did Billy die?"

"Gregg. He came to St. Louis for Billy after he was arrested. Billy tried to escape. That's what the paper said."

Clem's face darkened. "Why the dirty—"

"I'd rather think Billy did try to escape. I think he deliberately took the chance of being killed, rather than be made to implicate us. Clem, are you fully aware of just what we did?"

"I think I am. What was so terrible about it? We did a lot worse during the war."

"That *was* war. The Richfield thing, and the Freedom one wasn't war. Alan Vickers is after us."

"That black—"

Chapman laughed shortly. "Clem, I never told you that I know Alan Vickers. I met him on the train, the day I was returning to Freedom, when I kicked Pike off the train. Vickers offered me a job."

Clem Tancred gasped. "You, a Vickers man?"

"It *is* funny, isn't it? Vickers was pretty insistent about it, too. I told him I was a former Confererate and he seemed to think that was all right, since he was opening a new office in Kansas City."

"Be damned. Why, that'd be the office that's now on the Richfield and Freedom jobs! What would Old Alan say if he knew—"

"He does know, Clem. That's what I've been working up too. You see, I ran into Vickers again. In Chicago." Rapidly, he told Clem about the Chicago episode. The big man chortled in high glee when Chapman related the account of the poker game, but when he came to the point of his sudden flight from the hotel, he shook his head.

"But you don't know for sure if Vickers remembered you. He might not have placed you at all."

"Oh, he did, Clem. I know. I've read the Chicago papers almost every day since and there hasn't been another word in them about the whole business, not even about Billy Bligh."

"Why should there be? That happened in Missouri."

Chapman sighed. "You don't realize, Clem, that those two stories—the Freedom affair and the Richfield one—were two of the greatest newspaper stories since Appomatox. Why, I read about the Freedom job in New York City. They played it up for days. It was the first time in all the world that a bank had been held up by armed men in broad daylight."

Clem Tancred's eyes widened. "Is that so? I didn't know. Then why isn't there anything about it in the papers now?"

"Because Vickers has silenced it. He's working on the case and doesn't want his hand tipped."

"I don't get it. How can Vickers silence the newspapers?"

"Look, Clem," said Chapman. "You and I and the rest of the boys know the name of Vickers merely because he was mentioned a lot during the war for his spy work. But did you know that all during the war Vickers still operated his detective agency? That he has branch offices throughout the country and is paid huge fees by the railroads? I was at his house in Chicago. It's the house of a millionaire. We've been underestimating Vickers. He's one of the most important men in this country."

"Mebbe so," Clem admitted grudgingly, "but he didn't do much around Freedom. We never even saw his face there."

"Freedom is something else again, Clem. Freedom is under the control of the Union army, but that control is pretty slender. The army knows as well as everyone else does that seventy-five percent of the people in western Missouri are Southern in sympathy and that they would do anything to protect another Southerner against the North—the North meaning the law, in this case. Vickers would have to move pretty slow in our section. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Sheriff Gregg and George Pike weren't drawing money from Alan Vickers. Maybe Vickers figured the best way to clean up the mess was to have the bank robbers killed in what appeared to be a local squabble."

Anger distorted Clem's big face. "I've got a good notion to take the car back to Freedom and clean up on them—"

"Not yet, Clem. Let the thing simmer down. Maybe in spring. Are you in touch with Freedom?"

"No. There's no one there now that I give a damn about. Some cousins, but the less I see of them the better off I am. How about you?"

"Not a word. I haven't dared write my sister for fear they'd open her mail. I'd like to know what's going on, though. Is it possible to get a Kansas City paper here?"

"Oh sure. A bundle of them come in every day. Been too busy myself to read them. Braddock gets them regular."

"Speaking of Braddock, Clem," said Chapman, frowning. "I wish you hadn't told him about us."

"I didn't. Well, not until last week. We were here two weeks and he'd told me he served in the 19th Alabama under Leonidas Polk and we found out we knew a lot of different officers and one thing led to another— Well, he's a pretty shrewd fellow, Jim. He finally came right out and asked me if I was on the dodge, and knowing that he was cutting things pretty sharp here himself—"

"How do you mean, sharp?"

Clem laughed "You ought to see him with a pack of cards. He's got a faro layout that's a whiz. And I never saw a Mex that could play three-card monte the way he does."

"A crooked gambler," Chapman said softly. He looked up suddenly. The hotel clerk, Lester, had approached the table without Chapman hearing him.

He said, "Uh, Mr. Castlemon, the boss says she'd like to talk to you if you ain't busy."

"Mrs. Braddock?"

Chapman looked blankly at Clem Tancred, then got up. "I'll be back, Clem."

HE followed Lester to the lobby. The clerk pointed to a door that was just beside the counter. "She's in the office."

Chapman opened the door. He saw a small room about ten by twelve, furnished roughly with a scrubbed table, an armchair and a sofa. Mrs. Braddock was sitting in the armchair.

She smiled at Chapman and nodded to the sofa. "Won't you have a seat?"

Chapman sat down on the sofa and Mrs. Braddock turned her chair partly to face him.

"Mr. Castlemon," she began, "I understand you gave my husband some money."

"No," he said, "I gave some money to Mr. Hendricks, an old friend I discovered was here. I believe Mr. Hendricks is a partner in a business venture with your husband."

"Well," she said, "that's a roundabout way of putting it, but we won't quibble. It amounts to the same. My husband got the money."

"He's buying some hay with it. We have a right good proposition—"

She smiled thinly, then she reached to the table and picked up a folded newspaper. "This is the *Kansas City Star*. It just came in this afternoon on the train. Would you care to see it?"

He leaned forward and took the paper. It was folded so that his eyes fell on a two column head.

Arrest in Freedom and Richfield Bank Robberies.
Ed Taylor Arrested for Bank Holdup. Warrant Served by Sheriff Gregg. Authorities Closing in on Gang. Seek Clem and Dan Tancred, Clark Welker and Jim Chapman. Former Bushwhackers.

He didn't read the rest of the story. He tapped the paper lightly. "You know?"

"My husband told me that Mr. Hendricks is Clem Tancred. You—"

"Chapman. Ed Taylor is my brother-in-law. He had nothing to do with this."

"Can he raise ten thousand dollars bail?"

Chapman's mouth became a thin straight line. "Ed hasn't got fifty dollars. But I'm afraid I'll have to get that money back from Brad—your husband."

She shook her head. "Wes Braddock never gave a sucker back a dollar in his life."

He looked at her stony-eyed.

"It's not a nice word, is it? But you are a sucker, you know. And so is your friend, Clem Tancred. Wes didn't own that herd. It's owned by a Texan who'll be showing up here any day. He preferred to come to Kansas by way of Galveston, New Orleans and the river, rather than overland. Hudkins the man Tancred took to be the owner, is merely the trail boss of the herd."

"Well," said Chapman, "I think I'll go and see Hudkins."

"No," she said. "Don't. Hudkins is a killer."

For a long moment, Chapman looked at Mrs. Braddock. Then he tilted his head sidewards. "Why do you tell me this?"

"Because in another week Abilene will roll over and die. The season's finished. Wes knew it and he'd been trying to gather getaway money for several weeks. He walked out of this hotel a few minutes ago with the money you gave him and every dollar out of the safe. He stepped on to the westbound train and neither you nor I will ever see him again."

Chapman whistled softly. "You don't seem greatly concerned, for a lady whose just lost her husband."

She laughed shortly. "For the past year our relationship had been that of business partners. I ran the hotel and Braddock the saloon and gambling. He was a gambler on the Mississippi River steamers before the war."

"And you?"

She looked at him steadily. "My father ran a tavern in Aubrey, Kansas." . . . . In '62?"

She nodded. "I saw him killed. It was a guerilla with a pirate's beard. A man with yellow eyeballs—"

"Anderson, Bloody Bill. I—I rode with Anderson."

"I know."

There was nothing more he could say. By all the rules she should be a mortal enemy of Jim Chapman. But she wasn't. There was nothing hostile in her attitude.

He got up from the sofa. "You'll be leaving here, then?"

"Why? This is as good a place as any to spend the winter. And next spring —well, the drovers may come back."

HE left her and went back to the saloon.

"Let's take a little ride, Clem," he told his friend.

Clem got up quickly from the table. He had been drinking during Chapman's absence and was a little unsteady on his feet. Outside, they walked to the livery stable. But it wasn't until they were in the saddle that Chapman asked the whereabouts of Hudkins' herd.

"It's about three miles west of town," Clem replied. "But what's the use going out there now? Braddock won't be there. He's up north buying that hay."

"Braddock took the west-bound train," Chapman said, curtly. "He took with him my five thousand dollars and whatever money he got from you and Dan. He doesn't own that herd, and neither does Hudkins."

The expression that came to Clem Tancred's broad face was almost ludicrous. "What are you talking about, Jim?"

"Mrs. Braddock told me. He walked out on her. We have been bilked."

Clem Tancred kicked his horse in the belly. The animal sprang forward.

"Come on, Jim!" he yelled over his shoulder.

Hudkins saw them coming from a distance and it may have been mere coincidence that eight or ten of his men were gathered about him when they rode up.

Dan Tancred went pop-eyed when he saw Chapman. The latter merely nodded to him and addressed the red-bearded, fishy-eyed man who appeared to be the leader of the cowboys.

"Hudkins," he said, "your partner has skipped. I gave him five thousand dollars to buy hay for this herd."

"Why," said Hudkins innocently, "would you do that? Mr. Simpson'll be here any day now, and I don't reckon he figures on wintering the stock here. Fact is, he's figgerin' on sellin'—"

"Hudkins!" roared Clem Tancred, "reach for your gun!"

Hudkins bared his teeth. "What's the idea? I give your brother a job an'—" He half turned to the cowboys. "What do you make of this, boys?"

The "boys" expressed their opinions by an assorted batch of curses.

Jim Chapman held up his hand. "Hudkins, I want all the money you've got."

"A holdup!" cried Hudkins. "Hear that, boys?"

Chapman scarcely seemed to move, but suddenly his long-barreled Navy Colt was in his hand, pointing down at Hudkins. He spoke to Dan, "Go through him. Then take a look through his equipment. The rest of you—"

By that time Clem Tancred was down from his horse, gun in hand and stalking forward. He passed within a couple of feet of Hudkins and, wheeling suddenly, lashed out with the barrel of his Colt. It rapped Hudkins along the side of the head and the herd foreman toppled to the ground.

A sudden hush fell upon the cowboys. They looked at one another, but lacked a leader and a signal.

Dan Tancred went through Hudkins' clothes and dumped a handful of silver on the ground. Search of the chuck wagon and camp equipment produced a small bag of silver dollars, not more than two hundred.

When the loot was heaped on the ground, Chapman swore softly. "Braddock bilked him, too. The dirty—"

The Tancreds agreed with that comment and added their own lurid adjectives. Clem began to scoop up the money, but Chapman stopped him. "That change won't help any."

Hudkins was beginning to stir when the trio was mounted again. Chapman turned in his saddle for a last word to the cowboys. "Tell Hudkins that Braddock took the west-bound train. Maybe he can catch up with him."

Then they galloped off. But not toward Abilene. There was no use going there now. The game was played out.

CHAPTER VIII

THE JAWS OF THE TRAP

EVELYN COMSTOCK had been born in Johnson County, Missouri. Her father was a large planter, employing many slaves, but as Evelyn grew up, her father, because of his investments, began spending more and more time in town. When she was ten, the plantation was run by an overseer.

Major Comstock was the wealthiest man in the community. When the local bank failed, he reopened it and continued it with his private capital, expanding rapidly.

She was twelve when the world began to fall about them. Major Comstock saw it coming and wisely prepared for it. He withdrew more and more of his capital and transferred it to St. Louis and Chicago. But he was a Kentuckian by birth and his sympathies were naturally with the South, although he did not believe that the differences between the two sections were sufficient to make a recourse to arms necessary, in spite of the ominous signs.

War came. To Missouri it came like a thunderbolt. Evelyn's brother, Cliff, six years older, enlisted in one of the militia companies that were formed. Soon he was off, fighting at Wilson's Creek, against the Federal forces. Victorious, the Confederacy swept western Missouri. It was but the prelude to the holocaust.

The Confederacy receded and in its wake came terror.

Unionists and those who called themselves Southerners ravaged the countryside. Evelyn was fourteen when the devastation that was Order No 11 came to Johnson County. It meant complete evacuation, evacuation imposed on the citizenry by the Union Army. All day long Evelyn saw the pillars of smoke that indicated Southern homes going up. She was alone at home with her mother, when the soldiers came up and put the torch to their own home. By that time her father had already been one year with the Confederate Army. Evelyn helped to load a few belongings into a farm wagon and with her mother traveled to Nebraska. The weeks that followed were a nightmare and when they were over, her mother was gone.

In the end, miraculously, her father and brother both returned. They never went to Johnson County again. They settled in Clay County, in the village of Freedom. Her father began to rebuild

his fortune, drawing upon the money he had held all during the years in Chicago and St. Louis.

Life was gradually beginning anew for all of them. At eighteen she met Martin Halliday, the brilliant young attorney who, folks said, would go far.

Sometimes she wondered if she were in love with him. When he was not with her, she thought of him, even longed for his companionship. And when he came she was vaguely unsatisfied.

He was everything that a girl could ask for. Tall, handsome, in his late twenties, brilliant in his chosen profession. A captain in the late Confederate cavalry, he got along well even with the Union authorities. He was intelligent and a brilliant conversationalist.

He had never actually proposed to her, but somehow that seemed to be taken for granted and Martin talked of the future, when they would be married. Had he pressed her, she would probably have agreed to an early marriage, for she was lonesome in Freedom.

Things were like that when Evelyn took the trip to St. Louis, to visit her cousin, Jean. On her return occurred the incident of the drunken ruffian, Pike, and the intercession on her behalf of the pale youth, with the bitter look in his eyes.

She hadn't planned on going to the dance at Funk's Grove. Well, they had expected to go and then Martin had been compelled to go to Kansas City on business. Normally, Evelyn would have remained at home.

At the last minute, she persuaded her brother to take her to the dance.

"Martin won't like it," Cliff said sardonically, "but it'll do him some good. And as for me—well, I'd like to get a little better acquainted with that little Yankee girl, Bea Wainright."

They went to the dance and big Clem Tancred asked her to dance. "First time I've been able to get you away from Halliday," Clem chuckled as he danced her clumsily about the uneven floor.

"He'll be back tomorrow," Evelyn retorted. "But tell me about your friend, the prodigal Jim Chapman. Has he told you that he did me a good turn today?"

"Jim?" exclaimed Clem. "He hasn't even said he knew you. He was always the quiet kind."

"I wouldn't call him that," Evelyn said. "I think perhaps . . . he's seen a little too much."

"He has," Clem agreed. "And it made too much of an impression on him. Me—it didn't affect me much. Jim got in too young and he stuck to it too long. It's going to take him a long time to come back."

THAT night Evelyn thought of Jim Chapman. She saw his lean face and haunting eyes as she drifted into sleep.

In the morning she awoke sober and worried.

Martin would be back today. In the evening he would come to see her and tell her about his Kansas City trip. He would go into great detail about it all, and Evelyn would scarcely hear him. Yes, she *would* tonight. She would concentrate, for if she didn't she would think of Jim Chapman. And she didn't want to think about him.

She decided to keep busy that day and shortly after breakfast put on a gingham dress and sunbonnet and went out to work in her garden.

It was no use. Her hands worked automatically, but her mind was far away. After awhile she looked up and there he was, pale and more haunted of face than ever.

He moved toward her and fell.

What she did afterwards was instinctive. She had Rupe, the colored handyman, carry him into the carriage shed. Then she dispatched Rupe to Jim's sister and when he returned with the alarming news of all that had happened that morning, she got him into the wagon.

She went through the next week as if in a daze. She saw Martin Halliday, talked with him and scarcely remembered afterwards of what they had talked. Her brother, noting her condition, declared that she needed a trip and since he was going to Richfield on business for a couple of days, he would take her along. Evelyn grasped at the opportunity.

She saw Jim Chapman again, saw him with a smoking revolver.

Afterwards, when they were driving back to Freedom, her brother was silent for a long while, but finally he said, without looking at her,

"It *is* Jim Chapman, then?"

And then Evelyn admitted to her brother what she had been fighting within herself for days. "I'm afraid it is, but what can I do about it, Cliff? You know what he is."

Soberly her brother said, "Rupe told me. Thought I ought to know. I didn't say anything to you, Evelyn. I'd hoped you'd forget."

"I can't. I've tried and I can't. I'm not in love with him, I'm pretty sure of that. But his face haunts me. It's so bitter. As if he'd looked into hell."

Her brother patted her hand. "I'm sorry, Evelyn. The war's been over two years. He's gone too far to come back. You'll have to forget him."

She didn't forget him. She saw his face the evening before Martin Halliday came to her with the astonishing letter—the letter containing three thousand dollars in currency.

"What does he think I am, this fellow?" Halliday demanded. "It would ruin me to defend a notorious outlaw like him."

"Why, Martin? Isn't it an attorney's duty to defend those in trouble?"

"Yes, of course. But this Chapman—he's become too infamous. Holding up banks in broad daylight. There's no chance in the world of getting an acquittal for him, if he came to trial."

"But a man like him doesn't find it easy to get an attorney. If he wants to surrender, he should be given a fair chance."

Martin Halliday stared at her. "Why, Evelyn, you don't even know the man."

"Oh, but I do. He—he did me a good turn on the train coming back from St. Louis." Rapidly she related the incident, finishing with, "A man with such instincts can't be all bad. It was the war. He was on the wrong side. But weren't *we*—?"

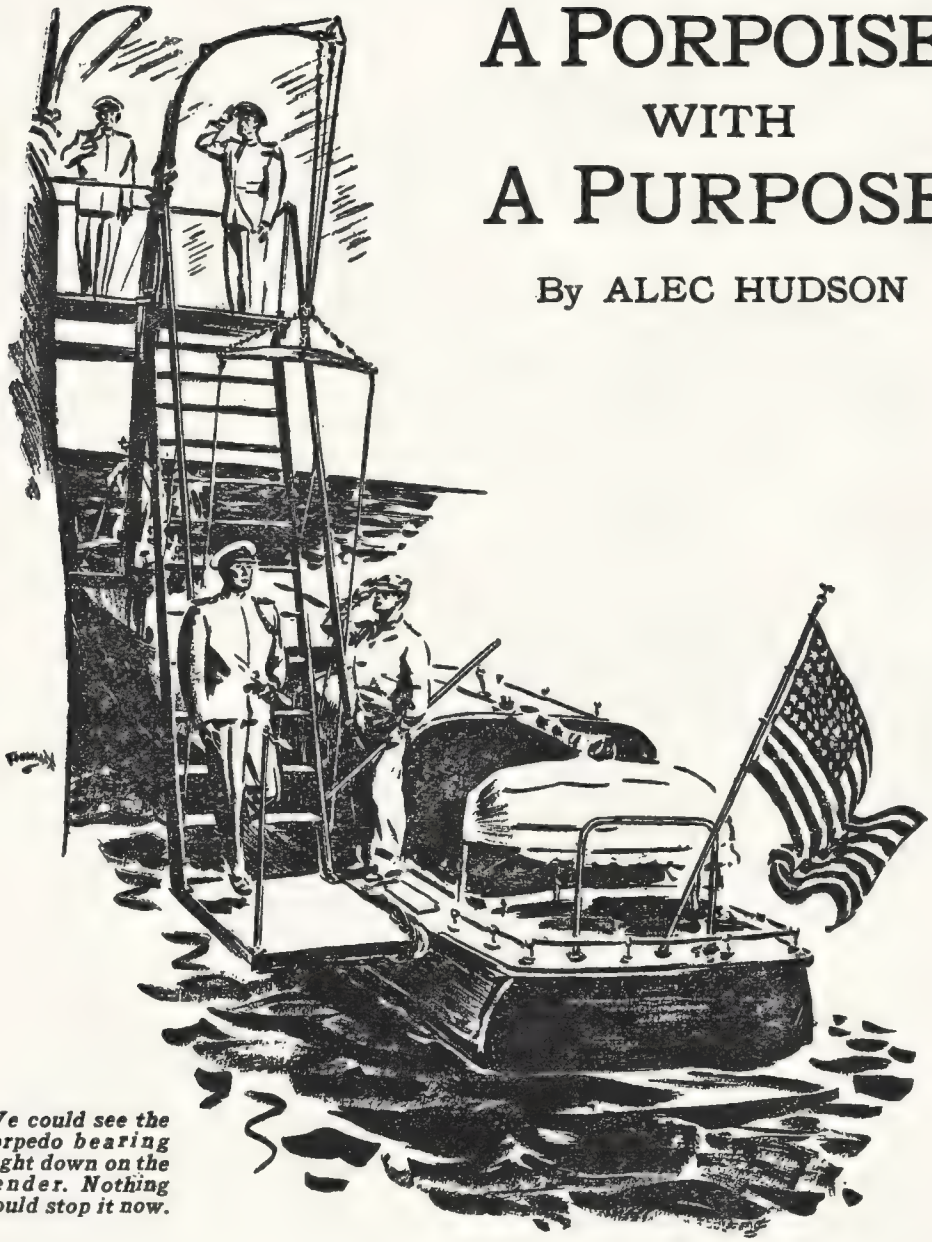
"But *he* was a guerrilla!"

"He was a Confederate. He lost a brother in the war. His sister, Mrs. Taylor, is as honest a woman as you'll find. Martin, I—I wish you'd help that boy."

(to be continued)

A PORPOISE WITH A PURPOSE

By ALEC HUDSON



We could see the torpedo bearing right down on the tender. Nothing could stop it now.

"HEWES, that torpedo didn't run straight."

I was sitting on the deck tightening up on the gyro pot cover. The skipper had stopped that damned pacing up and down. He stood looking down at me. I could see he wasn't in the mood for argument. I was a little goaty myself. I've been nursemaid to these tin fish now for going on fourteen years and when I put on the final adjustments they generally run hot and true. This one had missed. A boat from the screen had picked it up and returned it to us and I was just checking up on it to see if I could find out what had gone haywire.

"She was all right when she went in the tube, Captain, and she's all right now," I answered. The old man is a bear cat when it comes to making a torpedo

approach. No series of accidents painted that little white "E" on the bow and put a hash mark under it. Just the same, I knew there wasn't anything wrong with the fish.

"I can't explain it, Captain," Mr. Potter, the torpedo officer, chimed in. "I've checked every one of the final adjustments as Hewes put them on. I've checked her over now and I can't find anything wrong with her. I could swear this torpedo ran all right."

"Just the same she missed," the captain insisted. "Misses won't keep that "E" on the bow, no matter what you say about the torpedo. All our computations were correct and the periscope cross wires were right on the target's foremast when I fired. Figure it out for yourself."

"It's certainly funny," Mr. Potter replied. "We know we had the target's course and speed figured out exactly and still she missed. It's tough luck to go snaking under screens and guessing zigzags right and still not get a hit."

The skipper was mad enough to bite nails. It would burn me, too, to pull off a beautiful approach and send the fish right down the groove only to have the division commander signal over "Missed astern."

"I know the adjustments were all okay," I told the captain. "And like Mr. Potter says, he checked everything himself. If there was anything wrong with this torpedo when she was fired I'll eat it. Misses don't pay no prize money either, Captain," I told him.

"Perhaps there was something wrong with the tube," Mr. Potter suggested. Maybe he thought the skipper and I would have a real falling out. I knew the Old Man expected me to stand up for my rights but this was getting a little hot.

I felt sorry for Mr. Potter. He hadn't been aboard very long and a white E with a hash mark hangs heavy over the head of any young torpedo officer. His predecessor had hung up a mark to shoot at. Mr. Potter couldn't do a whole lot better but with a little tough luck like this he might do a whole lot worse. The Navy being what it is, with selection for promotion and all, a young officer has to keep his finger on his number all the time. Anyway you figure it, the torpedo officer was out of luck when we scored a miss. He was responsible to see that I put on the proper final adjustments and he helped the skipper figure out the target's course and speed during the approach. No matter how they missed he was bound to be holding at least one side of the sack. But if he thought he was going to calm down the Old Man by his remarks he was dead wrong.

"It's your business to know that the tubes are all right," the captain turned to Mr. Potter and snapped out. "If you have any doubts about them, do something, don't just 'perhaps' around here while the boat chalks up misses. Put a diver over the side to examine the outboard shutters as soon as we anchor. Make arrangements with the division torpedo officer to fire a cold test shot on the surface just as soon as you can. I want you to be sure of the tubes and everything else before we fire another practice."

The skipper stalked off to the bridge. Mr. Potter looked at me sheepishly and grinned. I knew he had brought in the tube as a red herring to drag across the trail, but maybe he had something there at that. There are a thousand and one things to make a torpedo go some other place than where it's aimed and it does no good to neglect any one of them.

AS SOON as the anchor was down I got a diving helmet and went over the side to look at the outboard ends of the tubes myself. Mr. Potter made a dive to check up too. Neither of us found anything much. There was a scuffed spot on the paint of the port upper tube shutter. It might have been caused by

almost anything. But that was the tube the torpedo had been fired from and in the circumstances it was very suspicious. We hoped a test shot would tell us more.

Mr. Potter fixed it up with the division torpedo officer to fire a test shot first thing Monday morning. That meant that he and I had to work all Sunday afternoon checking over and adjusting a torpedo getting her ready to run. Mr. Potter didn't complain any, but it's pretty tough on a married man to spend a Sunday afternoon working in a stuffy torpedo room. When we are out at sea so much, a Sunday afternoon in port when you haven't got duty is about the only chance a man has to have any home life.

I guess, though, married officers ain't so bad off that I should be breaking my heart about them. At least they had ought to be able to predict what their wives would be doing and if they can't there's steps they can take to improve the situation. It would take the seventh son of a son of a sultan to predict who that good looking little hash slinger at the Greasy Spoon would be out with if I didn't get ashore to watch out for her best interests.

I was just thinking about her when Swede Jansen, the engineer of the staff motor boat, comes poking his long nose into the torpedo room. I knew what he was looking for. The word had got around and he's just checking up to see if I was going to be busy on board all day.

"Hi, Sturdy," he says. "Looks like this is your busy day."

"Don't you count too much on appearances," I shot back at him. "If I come ashore and find you messing around where you haven't got no business, you'll wish you had been born a girl baby."

"Too bad them torpedoes won't run where you tell 'em to," he says, as he starts up the ladder.

"Too bad they ain't made outa cast iron and old brass like motor boat engines," I tells him. "Then they could have dumb Swedes to tinker them up a bit and they wouldn't be no call for real mechanics to sweat over them."

"Anyway the motor boat goes where you steer it to and my engines will keep it running without no outside help," he gives me as a parting shot as he goes through the hatch.

It didn't make my day any brighter. I knew I was stuck on board all day. After the torpedo was adjusted Mr. Potter had a couple of special recording instruments that I had to rig up on the tube. I don't see how a cute trick like Jane could put up with that Swede, with the stink of fuel oil he never could get out of even his liberty whites.

About supper time the skipper comes down the hatch to see how everything was going. He didn't have anything to kick about in the torpedo room. I thought maybe a week-end on the beach would have cheered him up a little and taken his mind off the boat. But it seems I was wrong.

"I didn't see you at the dance last night," Mr. Potter says to him after he had looked around a little.

"No, I couldn't get over there," the skipper replied as though he would like to drop the subject.

"Mr. Fentwhistle was there with Marjorie," Mr. Potter went on, ignoring all signals. "She was quite the belle of the ball. I had one dance with her and she was asking where you were."

The skipper just grinned in a sickly kind of fashion and didn't say nothing.

"You aren't going to let staff work and an extra half stripe get you down, are you, Captain?"

I thought Mr. Potter was a diplomat but maybe he just wasn't in a diplomatic frame of mind. Maybe he was thinking about how much more comfortable he could be in his own living room than he was there, lying on his back looking up into the afterbody, with oil dripping on his face.

"If I didn't have to go to sea all week and could jaunt off ashore every day by dinner time, maybe I could take better care of my social duties," the skipper admitted.

"Just don't underrate the competition," Mr. Potter kept on maliciously. "Those aiguillettes look snappy on a white uniform and being her old man's flag lieutenant certainly puts Fentwhistle in a fine strategic position. A

girl's got a right to place a pretty good value on a lieutenant commander's shoulder marks."

"What gave you the idea there was any sort of competition between Fentwhistle and me?" the captain asked with a grin.

"Now, Captain," Mr. Potter replied. "Don't let us down. We've been counting on you as the representative of the blue water school against the pond lily navy."

I COULD appreciate that me and the captain had more in common than just this cantankerous torpedo. The boys in the engine room and in the torpedo room don't get around to the social functions but we get the word. Marjorie Barnes is the admiral's daughter. I knew her since I was a boot and she used to wear pigtails and ride in the bow of the motor boat. She had ambitions to learn to chew tobacco then but now she's growed up to have half the fleet's bachelor officers running around in circles. Everybody knew that the skipper was making a strong play for her and that he was meeting with stiff competition from Lieutenant Commander Fentwhistle on the admiral's staff. We were all squeezing for the skipper.

I knew this Mr. Fentwhistle too, the stuffed shirt! If he knew that it took a lot of grease and oil to make the Navy run he never showed it. Last year he had argued hard for a sighting penalty on one of our battle practices and it nearly cost us our "E". He was target umpire and he claimed he saw our periscope long before we fired. I think he had spots before his eyes, myself. The skipper showed he didn't even have the periscope up when Mr. Fentwhistle claimed he saw it. It was a hot argument, and it didn't help out our relations with the staff very much.

Monday morning we anchored out a few hundred yards astern of the tender. We were well clear and over on her starboard hand. The fish was in the tube ready to go. She had a charge of air in the air flask but no fuel and no water. She would run for maybe fifteen hundred yards and her depth mechanism was set to hold her just under the surface so that she could be observed all during the run. Of course we were going to fire while the ship was on the surface so we could stand on deck and watch the torpedo leave the tube.

The skipper wasn't in any hurry. There were a lot of details he wanted to check over. He had to be sure the bay was clear of traffic over the probable area of the torpedo run. He wanted to make sure that if the tube interfered with the fish we could find out what went wrong. There were some last minute adjustments to be made on the special recording gear on the tube below. We had a motor launch alongside the port side, ready to light out after the torpedo as soon as it was fired.

About half an hour after we anchored, the staff motor boat comes alongside and out steps Lieutenant Commander Fentwhistle. Swede Jansen looks out of the engine room hatch and gives me a leer. "Too bad you couldn't get ashore last night," he sings out.

Mr. Fentwhistle saluted the side all correct and the captain returned the salute.

"How long is this funny business going to take, Burnet?" he asked.

"It won't take long to get out the test shot," the captain replied courteously. "After that it all depends on what we find out."

"I've got to make out the week's operation orders and I've got to know," Mr. Fentwhistle went on. "Seems to me you're wasting time. If you've got to fire this test shot to build up an alibi for a miss, get it over with."

The captain flushed red around his ears.

"Mr. Fentwhistle," he says slowly and deliberately, "your rank and position demand a certain amount of respect from me, regardless of what I think of you personally. But I am in command of this ship and I am bound by tradition and by Navy regulations to uphold the dignity of that position. I don't propose to be insulted on my own deck by anybody. You have my permission to leave the ship, sir."

"Don't get huffy, Burnet," Mr. Fentwhistle replied as he retreated to his

boat. "I didn't mean anything personal by what I said."

He had made an officious ass of himself and been promptly told off by an officer junior to him and in the presence of witnesses. But you can't cross a man both in love and in war and expect him to weigh the consequences of what he says.

I THINK the captain took more time than ever in completing his preparations. The better part of another hour went by. At last the range was clear and the fish was ready to go. The retrieving boat was lying alongside the port sea ladder with the engine running, ready to cast off. Mr. Potter and the division torpedo officer stayed below to watch their trick instruments, but both me and the captain wanted to see what we could see of the torpedo as she left the tube. We was both on deck, over the tube, hanging on to the stub mast stay, leaning way out over the side watching for the torpedo to come out.

The captain waved his hand to the bridge to signal for them to fire. There was a thud like a slight earthquake shock below us. The tube gave a throaty coughing grunt. A ton of torpedo was on the way. The bright steel of her long gleaming body flashed for an instant right below our feet. We could see her whirling propellers clawing frantically for a grip on the water. I thought I heard the ring of metal on metal, as though she had banged against the shutter as she came out. Both the captain and I looked up to follow the course of the torpedo. We could see the fish itself for a while and the white track of her exhaust bubbles left a clear path behind her.

The torpedo got out of the tube all right, but I was pretty sure her rudder assembly must have hit something. She started to wobble and shimmy and instead of going straight ahead her course eased off to the left. The skipper motioned for me to follow and we both ran aft and jumped into the boat.

The coxswain didn't need orders. We was off after that torpedo before our feet hit the floor boards. But talk about your tortoises racing with rabbits. If anything happened we probably wouldn't get there in time for the post mortems, even.

"Looks like Mr. Potter was right about the tube, Hewes," the captain told me. "Didn't you hear her strike as she left the tube?"

"We'll have to jack out that shutter and get it straightened," I replied. "I knew there wasn't nothing wrong with the adjustments."

Both of us had our eyes glued to the torpedo track. If she dove into the mud or sank we would have a long hard job getting her back. Anything might happen to her if the steering mechanism had been damaged much. A torpedo costs a lot of money. If we lost her everybody would be in hot water.

After the torpedo had made a run of a couple of hundred yards she broached all of a sudden. She lifted her whole gleaming length clear of the water and shook her bright yellow exercise head like a sail fish trying to shake out a hook. It seemed like she stood on her tail and looked around to see what damage she could do in revenge for that insulting smack in the stern as she left the tube. When she came down in the water again she acted like a porpoise with a purpose.

She heads still further off to the left. Her course would bring her awful close to the tender now. She wasn't carrying explosives, of course, and the exercise head was designed to collapse if it hit anything very solid. But there was a lot of power left in her air flask and she had a lot of speed and momentum behind her. She had fire in her eye and black mischief in her heart. There's some who accuse me of putting her up to what she did. Let me say right now that it was her own show. I guess I enjoyed it as much as anybody, but I didn't have a hand in it.

The quartermaster back on the submarine had seen her broach and he could see where she was headed. He laid on the whistle cord and the boat lets out a mournful bellow like a ghost with a bellyache. He was trying to warn the tender of what was coming and if they'd paid any attention they might have

saved themselves a lot of trouble. Of course the torpedo couldn't do a lot of damage. It wasn't as if she was carrying a war head. But she might dent one of the tender's ancient plates and anyway there would be an awful bump. The torpedo would probably sink where it would be a tough job to recover it.

From the boat we could see the torpedo track bearing right down on the tender. Nothing could stop it now. We could only hope it would take another turn and pass clear.

On the deck of the tender I heard the shrill whistle of the boatswain's pipe. Both the captain and I looked up from the torpedo track, expecting to see the tender doing something to prepare for the trouble that was standing her way. But a different sight met our eyes.

ABSOLUTELY undisturbed by the raucous behavior of the submarine, Lieutenant Commander Fentwhistle, the admiral's flag lieutenant, was leaving the ship on official business and with full ceremony. Two side boys stood at rigid salute. The tender's officer of the deck, correct in white gloves and spyglass, attended the side. The boatswain's mate put all his lungs into the effort behind his pipe. The staff motor boat waited at the foot of the gangway, her spotless deck and polished bright work shining.

Center of this little tableau was Lieutenant Commander Fentwhistle. The gold and blue of his "eagle guts" stretched across his starched white uniform. What the well dressed naval officer will wear was portrayed in every line. He saluted the side and ran briskly down the ladder to the waiting boat.

The torpedo and the flag lieutenant reached the foot of the gangway together, and in accordance with the best naval etiquette the torpedo got into the boat first. Right there all etiquette and convention ended. The torpedo smacked the boat square in the stern, just inboard of the rudder. The force of the blow carried the head of the torpedo right through the stern planking and a good three feet into the boat. There she stuck firm and fast with her propellers still spinning.

Mr. Fentwhistle wasn't watching his feet like he ought to. He was busy giving orders to the coxswain. When he went to step off the gangway into the boat the boat wasn't there anymore. The boat jumped out away from the gangway like a bull that's been stung by a bee. Mr. Fentwhistle steps right over the side and lands in the water with a big splash, starched white uniform, "eagle guts" and all. In a second he was splashing around like a bull whale in love.

The boatswain's mate is still piping the side but the side boys poke their heads over the rail and you can see their mouths open in hearty guffaws. The officer of the deck starts running around like a hen on a hot griddle. The quartermaster heaves over a lifebuoy and nearly brains the guy in the water. Low and slow the bugler busts swimming call. I'll bet Mr. Fentwhistle never forgives him for that. All up and down the tender's side heads stick out to enjoy the show. The admiral pops out of his cabin to see what's going on. Finally somebody recovers enough to run down the gangway to fish old Fentwhistle out of the drink with a boat hook.

Meantime the torpedo is just getting into its stride. The boat gets underway with a jerk. As she slides past the tender's lower boom the bow hook makes a grab at the guesswarp with his boat hook. He has the tough luck to get a good hold on it. The torpedo didn't have no respect for bow hooks. The boat went right out from under the man's feet and left him dangling from the boom, hanging on to the boat hook, half in and half out of the water.

Of course nobody knew yet what had happened. A loose torpedo was far from anybody's mind. The coxswain heaved around on the wheel but the torpedo had jammed the rudder solid and it had complete charge of the boat. The coxswain signals for the engine to stop. He heaves back on the bell pull until bell pull and all come out by the roots. Swede Jansen stuck his dumb mug out of the engine room hatch to see what was causing the commotion. The motor boat was circling to the right. We were close enough to it now to see every-

thing that goes on but there wasn't much we could do but laugh.

When Jansen sees the tender flashing by, his eyes bugged out so far you could have knocked 'em off with a baseball bat. He ducks down to make sure his clutch was out and I could hear him shut down the engine to make sure. When he stuck his head up again the boat was still going ahead four bells and a jingle.

"Shut down your blankety blank engine," the coxswain yells at him.

Jansen opens his mouth to answer. I guess the coxswain thinks he has suddenly gone crazy. He reached over the combing and made a pass at Jansen with the remains of the bell pull. The next thing we know they are chasing each other all over the boat and the boat was still running wild with us chasing it.

"What you trying to do, get me disrated?" the coxswain yells at Jansen.

"The engine ain't running," Jansen yells back as soon as he gets a chance to catch his breath.

This don't make sense to the coxswain and he lunges out after Jansen again. The boat keeps circling to the right and it's heading back toward the tender now. But the torpedo is about through. The air in the flask is about exhausted. The motor boat slows down and we come alongside.

Jansen has at last caught sight of the torpedo still stuck in the stern of the boat. He points to it and he and the coxswain stand there looking at it with their mouths full of teeth, too dumbfounded to speak.

When we come alongside we see that Jansen has collected one of the nicest shiners that's been seen in this division for a month of Sundays. Even if he and the coxswain don't drag down a month's restriction apiece for the little fracas they put on, that eye won't be a social asset to the Swede for a long time.

FOR a few minutes we have our hands full. I got a line onto the torpedo and slipped on a propeller lock. She's a tame kitten now but there's a big hole in the stern sheets of the boat. The water was pouring in alongside the torpedo and only the engine room bulkhead kept the boat from sinking.

We towed the motor boat over to the tender. Fortunately we didn't have far to go. The tender people had snapped out of their hop. The motor boat slings had been bent onto the whip. In a minute we had her fast. The winch took a strain and took the weight of the boat off the water so she wouldn't sink. With a lot of heaving and grunting we pulled the torpedo out of the hole in the boat.

When we had the torpedo secure the captain told me to drop him off at the gangway and to take the torpedo back to the ship.

"Get that torpedo on deck and opened up for inspection right away but don't touch any of her machinery. There will probably be a board of investigation over there right on your tail. Tell Mr. Potter to be sure and find out what is wrong with the tube. And you'd better wipe that grin off before the board gets there. Maybe somebody else won't think that this is so funny."

He was grinning himself and I could see he wasn't wasting any sympathy on Mr. Fentwhistle, who still stood dripping at the top of the gangway.

"There are going to be some people who will always believe that I whispered some private directions to that torpedo before you got it into the tube last night. She sure put on a star performance," the captain admits.

The skipper stepped out of the boat onto the gangway. I could hear the admiral engaging Mr. Fentwhistle in a private conversation that you couldn't hear no more than five hundred yards.

"When you step into a boat, can't you look and see if the boat's there? You need to see more salt water, but you don't have to swallow it!" The admiral's chuckle made a noise like a bull-frog in a rain barrel.

I knew then that even if the captain was going to have a lot of explaining to do, there were a lot of other people with more rank than me that had enjoyed the show. And if Marjorie Barnes added any of her salt tears to the salt water that took the starch out of Fentwhistle's uniform, then she'll never get another chew of my tobacco.

By a miracle of frantic luck he had managed to get clear. . . .

PEACE WAITS AT MAROKEE

A NOVELETTE

By H. Bedford-Jones

DAWN was imperceptibly lifting above the marble hills of hell that lie between the Nile Valley and the Red Sea.

The Breguet two-seater, crumpled on its nose in the gravelly flat, was now a roaring pillar of flame; Essarts, the dead pilot, was at the bottom of that noble funeral pyre. Jean Facini, assistant pilot and gunner, had managed to bring the burning plane to a blind landing. By a miracle of frantic luck, he got clear before the fire touched him.

He had never expected to land alive. He was still numb and shaken by it all, as he sat at a safe distance from exploding tanks and cartridges, drearily watching the prodigious burst of smoke and flame. The symbols of France on the body and wings of the Breguet vanished while he stared.

Suddenly a speck overhead caught

Facini's eye, and he looked up. Dawn was mounting the eastern sky. The speck glinted like silver. It was a bomber, touched by the sunlight as yet denied to the world below. It glinted again and then vanished. He sighted it anew, but now as a dark descending object whose perfect silence startled him.

He moved farther from the heat of the blaze, staring. One of those big English craft, he perceived; a Blenheim, carrying a regular crew. Several of them had taken part in the raid on the Italian East Africa bases.

His first thought was that it had sighted the flames and was making for him, perhaps with intent to land on this strip of gravel and sand and cruel boulders, perhaps to send rescue later. But was it making for him? Was any human hand guiding this approaching ship? Fresh fear laid hold upon him, and a frightful wild surmise. A phantom, perhaps—a phantom plane!

He could hear no motors at all. There was no exhaust. The Blenheim was abnormally and horribly silent. He could even make out the motionless propellers as she came sweeping down, leveling out to make a landing.

Jean Facini crossed himself and swallowed hard, staring up with distended eyes. He was a shrewd, capable man, usually well-poised, unmoved by peril or risk; but now his steady, blithe efficiency was sapped by terror of the unknown.

The wings and fuselage of the Blenheim were bullet-torn, riddled, shot through and through. Next instant she was down, down a hundred yards away —down with a terrific crunch and crash, nosing up and over as the Breguet had done, only to fall back again, her left wing tearing clear away. Facini saw her settle motionless, silent as death itself. He sat there, horror distending his eyes.

Abrupt relief seized him, when her door opened and three men tumbled out of her. They looked about the empty skies and started toward him. He rose and went to meet them.

Three men; introductions were simple. Jock Erne, Anzac co-pilot, gaunt and loose-hinged and cheerful. Lance, observer and photographer, a quiet, deep-eyed, older man. Gunner Hawkins, stubby-nosed, rabbit-toothed, Cockney by his tongue.

"Saw your flame and nosed down for it," said Erne. "Alone?"

"Alone now." Facini's dark, mobile features were composed now. He pointed to the flames and told of Essarts, and the Caproni that had done for him. "It was wonderful of you to chance the landing."

Erne grinned. "No choice. Must have been the same Caproni that nailed us, but we got her. We were riddled. Petrol tanks emptied. Pilot riddled too. Poor Boddy! He was a grand pilot—Wellington chap. Well, he's gone. We touched up the jackals rather well, eh? Got those petrol tanks at Massowa, if I'm any judge. You speak English well."

Facini smiled. "I had an importing business at Mentone. I was often in London."

He saw blood dripping down over Erne's left hand, as the other turned.

"Lance, old chap! You know the orders. Take out everything we may need, then let her go. All the maps, and the water, especially the water. Hawkins, my lad, get your first-aid packet and go after this arm."

Erne sat down and bared his left arm; a bullet had torn the flesh badly. Hawkins fell to work on it. Lance went stumbling back toward the Blenheim.

Facini sat and waited, wearily. He looked the picture of despair; in reality, he was gloriously happy from the reaction. Happy to be alive, to have wads of money in his belt, to be rid of the French service forever. He cloaked the hatred in his eyes, as he met a quick glance from Erne.

"Facini, eh?" said the Anzac. "Odd names you French chaps have, to my notion."

"In Italian, it would be Fa*chi*ni." He pronounced the name in Italian fashion. "Yes, once our people were Italian in Savoy, long ago. I am a Savoyard, you see. Now we're all French, of course."

"You heard the radio reports last night, before we left the base?"

Facini nodded. He got out a packet of *jaunes* and lit one, to hide the savage exultation that shook him. France broken, crushed, done for! And now the

army in Syria, of which his squadron formed part, would cease hostilities. He had been in the last French air raid of the war! Savoy would be Italian once more—and these English called the Italians jackals! Well, let them wait a bit, these English who had ceased to rule the world!

With cynical eye he watched Lance unload necessities from the crippled Blenheim; he asked Erne about her wireless and found it, too, had been riddled. They were preparing to fire her, dead pilot and all, lest her secrets fall into enemy hands.

Facini smiled inwardly, thinking of the information and photos he had given the Italian agent in Port Said; the new bomb racks and sights developed by the English, the new guns and mountings—everything! Italy, thanks to him, knew as much about these Blenheims as England did.

THE sun came up, red and scorching. Lance started his bonfire. The three Britons saluted the dead pilot; Facini rose and saluted also, quite sincerely. A brave man deserved this gesture, irrespective of nationality. Wiry, swarthy, alert, Facini looked what he was: one who could risk danger with calm and lucid gaze. A fifth columnist, whether spy or traitor, need not be a rascal.

"In case anyone's looking for us," said Erne, "take half an hour to give 'em a chance to spot the smoke. Get a bit of sleep while waiting, if you can."

Facini scooped hollows in the sand, only too glad to let someone else take charge. As he fell asleep, he wondered for the first time where the hell he was. Nothing about here except wild hills, touches of desert, utter emptiness. The crackling roar of the Blenheim was his last memory.

He wakened to find the sun high. Sitting up, he saw the other three grouped close by, and a pile of salvaged material, canteens and food. He fumbled in his jacket pocket and drew out a thick package of chocolate.

"All I can contribute," he said, and tossed it on the pile. Erne, who held a map open on his knees, beamed gauntly.

"Good. Know any Arabic? Neither do we. Before we left, I was given verbal bearings of a place whose name sounded like Marokee. Ever hear of it?"

"Oh, yes! I was there three weeks ago, landing supplies." Facini knuckled his eyes. "It's a spot near the Italian East, being secretly equipped as emergency landing field and advanced base for air operations. I understand it's to be kept a secret until the defenses are complete and it can be placed in use."

Erne nodded. "I see. You know more about it than we do, eh?"

"By good luck. We escorted some of your bombers landing guns there."

"Well, it's forty miles from here, roughly." Erne glanced around. "No chance now of our being picked up. We've food, and perhaps enough water to last three days. These hills are desert rock piles, inhabited only by a few Arabs and goats. There are no roads that we'll come upon; the existing tracks date from Roman times. We're close to Eritrean territory and can easily make it, surrendering to the first Italian outpost; or, if you choose, we can head for Marokee, or whatever the dashed name is. It lies to the north."

"So does the Red Sea," said Lance, his quiet eyes filled with anxiety. "Let's not waste time. We head north?"

"If you chaps decided," replied Erne amiably. "I warn you, it'll be tough work! It'll take days. All blank hills and gorges, you know, blistering rock, a climb the whole blessed way. Either that, or turn ourselves in to the jackals."

"We'd bloody well best be abaht it," spoke up Gunner Hawkins. "I've reasons of me own for wanting to get there. Marokee, I sye!"

Three pairs of eyes went to Facini.

"Marokee," he said simply, and it was settled.

"Due north by compass." Erne folded his map. "We'll ready the loads and get started. Later we can find some shelter against the sun and rest until the worst heat of the day has passed."

They went to work. Facini, scornful of these English, hating them in his heart, set himself to match their efficiency and stamina and good cheer; he was savagely resolved to prove himself

just a trifle better at everything than they were.

They got off at last. Pistols, binoculars, food and water. Nothing else. The water was the worst to carry, even in slung canteens, for it weighed like lead. Striking away from the gravel flat, Erne led into a narrow valley that trended north and east. It was a shallow gorge of naked rock and sand. The heat was consuming and terrible.

Facini laughed and talked as he swung into step. To himself, his laughter was more cynical. They were sorry for him. The enormous fact of France's utter collapse had stunned the army in Syria, but it had brought Facini wild exultation. And they were sorry for him, a Frenchman! They might better be sorry for themselves, he reflected.

Laughter surged again in him as he marched along the rocky defile. These others wanted to reach Marokee—well, so did he, and with far more reason! Not for the sake of rescue alone, but for what awaited him there. For he would be "Fachini" there, and no longer "Facini"; honor and decorations, an officer's uniform, a black shirt and the coveted emblem of the Fasces, would be awaiting him. For, by this time, the flag of Italy was waving over Marokee.

More than two weeks ago, he himself had sent through word about this place, and had received a reply. By the 20th, they had assured him, Marokee would be captured. Not destroyed, but surprised in the night and captured bodily, by a column of blackshirts and askaris from Italian East. Captured, to serve Italy against Egypt and the British base headquarters. He had suggested the clever scheme himself. Have a column in readiness, unsuspected. Loose a rain of bombs, destroy the wireless, rush the place; no word of its capture would reach the British until too late. And Italy would be solidly established there—forever!"

They had assured him it would be done before the 20th. And today, he remembered, was the 22nd. Yes, thought Facini, he could well afford to smile!

No wonder he wanted with all his heart to reach Marokee, and what awaited him there.

"CHEERFUL blighter, ain't 'e?" observed Gunner Hawkins.

It was mid-afternoon and they were stirring. The shade of a rocky overhang had given shelter; packs off, boots off, they had slept well. Never better, thought Hawkins to himself, eyeing the strange naked walls of the ravine and the blazing rocks around.

A meal polished off, they were re-forming the loads. Hawkins nudged Lance and jerked his thumb at Facini, who was humming a brisk, gay air as he worked. Lance nodded carelessly.

"Yes, a good sort. By the way, Hawkins, why are you so anxious to reach Marokee?"

"Oo, me? Oh, I 'ave reasons!" Hawkins evaded, deliberately, showing his rabbit-teeth in a cheerful grin. Lance asked no more, but relapsed into his air of worried anxiety.

The loads were finished. Erne was poring over his map, Facini was lazily at stretch, still humming. The bloke had a rare good voice, thought Hawkins, stuffing his pipe and smoking with fair content. Aside from the heat and the things that irked him, and his desire to reach Marokee as soon as possible, Hawkins had no particular worry. They would pull through somehow. This was no worse than the blinding mid-summer camp. He had been scared to the quick at dawn, and the solid earth felt good.

"Gor! To think 'ow the cap'n spouted blood, and the ruddy crate spouted petrol!" he muttered. "Fair makes me sick, it does. And us not knowing if we'd find a landing place, and 'aving to keep up speed or fall plop! But 'ere we are, safe and sound. "

Surreptitiously, he adjusted the pad under the collar of his tunic; handkerchief and torn shirt-tail were pinned there, out of sight. Pipe in teeth, he buckled his belt and hitched his shoes on swollen feet, then rose and strolled over to the Frenchman.

Facini was smoking one of his vile cigarettes and easing his position. He moved a flat rock with stockinged feet, shoving it aside. A strangled word escaped Hawkins.

"Look aht!"

With the word, he kicked frantically. From Facini broke a howl of pain and fury; the hobnailed boot struck his feet and ankles, so violently as to slew him about. He rolled over and came erect, agile as a cat, his swarthy features convulsed with rage.

Hawkins pointed. "You 'ad your ruddy feet fair on top of 'em!"

Looking down, Facini turned a sickly white. Hawkins grinned, amused by the man's sudden terror. Exposed by the overturn of the flat stone, two immense black scorpions were circling, tails aloft. Erne darted in and hammered them with a sharp bit of rock.

"Well done, gunner!" he exclaimed. "Damned well done!"

Hawkins glowed happily to the praise. Then he found Facini clasping him, embracing him in a fervor of comprehension and gratitude. He broke away and wiped his cheeks.

"Come, now, none o' that!" he gasped. "Too bloody thick, I calls it—"

"You saved my life," Facini was saying earnestly. "*Mon ami*, with all my heart I thank you, I thank you! It is something not easily forgotten."

Hawkins, abashed, grinned and turned this unwelcome emotion into a jest. They loaded up and were off, Erne and Lance in the lead, the other two following.

Unexpectedly, Hawkins found himself warming to the Frenchman; they had been drawn together by that sharp claw of chance. They tramped along and exchanged intimacies; each found the other a person of interest. Hawkins heard about the girl who was waiting in Mentone. He, broadly wistful, told of the missus and the two kids back home; by the last letter received, they had been evacuated to a farm in Sussex, away from the threatened bombs and agony of London.

Hawkins had knocked about in the army for a dozen years. He was ambitious to retire and raise, of all things, cabbages; they appealed to him, and he expatiated solemnly on their merits. Facini, who was in the perfume business or had been, talked of scent extraction and blending; Hawkins found this new and fascinating. Cabbages and perfumes alike had been knocked off their pins by the war, but Hawkins was consoling.

The 'ole world's a bit screwy," he said complacently. "Soon's we clean up the Jerries, it'll swing back again. I'll 'ave me cabbages yet."

"No." Facini shook his head. "It's we who must change, my friend. The old order of things has gone forever. The world we knew will never come back again. If we're clever, we'll recognize the fact and profit by it. Now that France has collapsed, Hitler is supreme."

"Oo, 'im?" Hawkins laughed the derision he felt. It was good to be an Englishman, he reflected; a person with complete surety of heart and soul, a man not to be changed or bowled over like the froggies. "You wyte and see. Steady does it, me lad, steady does it! This 'ere plyce we're makin' for—wot's its bloody name?"

"Marokee," said Facini. "I've not seen it written, but that's the way it sounds."

"I 'ope to 'ell we get there soon."

He was aware of a curious glance from the darkly alert eyes. "Yes? Why?"

"Never you mind, lad. I 'ave me reasons."

Facini smiled. "So your feet are hurting, eh? Yes, these rocks are sharp; they're hard on boots and feet alike."

Hawkins merely snorted. He had no intention whatever of imparting his private reasons to anyone; but he certainly wanted to see Marokee ahead. He was jolly glad of that pad beneath the edge of his collar.

"Bet you didn't tyke it so cool when your ship was afire!" he observed.

"Cool? *Mon Dieu!* I was too frightened to know what I did," Facini confessed gravely. "After I got clear of her, I sat there shaking all over."

"Comin' down unexpected like does grip at you." Hawkins shook his head. He liked this frank admission of fear. "Don't mind sying that I 'ad the wind up meself when we got ripped wide open and the cap'n killed. Gor! What a perishin' sight 'e was!"

THE afternoon blaze died down into grateful shadows here in the ravine. This road, however, was swinging too much eastward.

"Well, come along everybody —let's be at it!"

With his binoculars, Erne climbed the hillside on their left. Presently came his voice bidding them join him. It was a half hour's climb. At the crest they found more daylight, but evening was close just the same; the gorges to right and left were bluish and vague with shadow.

Hawkins, panting, cursed luridly to himself and inched his tunic back. He had left it unbuttoned; discipline did not exist here, and no one noticed or cared. He glowered at the endless sea of hills ahead.

"We must get down to that valley on the left," Erne was saying. "We can do it before darkness comes. Apparently it cuts straightaway northward, and that's our direction. Might come upon a Roman road or track, but I'm afraid it'd run east and west."

"Roman?" said Lance in some surprise. "Here in this desolation?"

Erne grinned faintly. "The finest stone and marble on earth used to come from here. Rome quarried these hills to form her most beautiful buildings. Then the barbarians swallowed up the world and those things were forgotten; same as they'll be a thousand years from now when somebody walks over Westminster and tells how Hitler had bombed it."

"Oh!" said Lance. "You mean, over Auckland and Wellington, after the Japs have taken New Zealand!"

Erne chuckled, and put away his binoculars.

"Score one for you, Canuck! Still, the Japs are closer to Vancouver than they are to Auckland, glory be! Well, come along everybody; let's be at it!"

The descent was long and hard. Hawkins and Lance gradually fell behind.

"Funny 'im knowing so blasted much about this 'ere country!" Hawkins jerked a thumb toward Erne, ahead. "Rare good sort, for a colonial. Anzac, ain't 'e?"

"Yes; New Zealand." Lance nodded and grimaced. "Damn! That's what I get for not wearing issue boots. These are light ones for hot weather. Hope they'll hang together."

Hawkins sucked at his pipe to fend off thirst. He had no particular use for toffs like Lance. Too bloody good for issue boots, was he? And some sort of colonial into the bargain; Canuck or something.

The colonials were all right, of course; but still colonials.

Assuredly the rocks were bad. By the time the four men had won to the floor of the ravine Erne wanted to follow, they had had their fill of climbing and it was full dark. Luckily the moon was waxing and sat high overhead to help light the way.

The hours dragged wearily by. Hawkins cursed Jock Erne and admired him vastly; a pusher, he was, who kept them going at all costs, without mention of his own hurt. Midnight found them dead beat, for the floor of this gorge was all loose tumbled rock. Erne halted for an hour's rest. Hawkins flung himself down and was asleep before he knew it.

He wakened to Erne's touch and low voice; the pilot was at his side, rousing him. The wounded arm was hurting like blazes and needed a fresh dressing; and no sparing the iodine either, said Erne. Hawkins got out his kit, bared the wound, and worked while Erne struck a match or two to help him see.

"Looks a bit of all right," he observed. and fumbled in the obscurity. "'Arf a mo', now; there we are. Feel better?"

"Lord, man! It's wonderful!" Erne relaxed, with a sigh. "What did you put on it."

"Secret, sir." Hawkins furtively screwed down the top of his canteen again. "Bit of a secret my missus taught me."

"Look here!" Erne gripped his wrist. "Not water? You didn't put water on it?"

"Wot? Wyste good water? Bli' me, sir, I wouldn't go and do that!" Hawkins declared indignantly.

"All right. Remember, that water means life to us! I doubt if we've covered ten miles. May find better going ahead. Lord! I certainly want to see Marokee in a hurry!"

"No more'n I do. Not by 'alf!" said Hawkins fervently. He hitched back his tunic and swore afresh. Erne peered at him.

"Here, what's wrong with you? Speak up! Why are you so damned anxious to get there?"

Hawkins felt himself yield by force of habit to the voice of authority. The others were asleep; he might as well be frank about it. After all, it was an order.

"Because o' me ruddy neck, sir," he replied uncomfortably.

"Well, what's wrong with your neck?" snapped Erne.

"Two boils a-comin' on fast." Hawkins felt injured at have to make such an admission. "Faster than I looked for. If we don't get there soon, I'll go fair mad, that's wot!"

"Oh!" Erne paused. "That's bad. I had one, three or four years back; couldn't lie abed nursing it, either.

Frightfully bad! Well, steady on! We'll reach Marokee all right."

With a warm handclasp, he went to waken the others. Hawkins sat in a glow, his heart surging, his fingers cramming the final crumbs of tobacco into his pipe.

"Might ha' knowed 'e wouldn't laugh. Not 'im!" he reflected. "Gor! I'm sorry as I didn't put twice as much water on that 'ere bandage!"

AFTER another short halt at dawn, Erne kept pushing ahead until the morning was partly gone, and then made camp. High time, too. Lance was making heavy weather of it.

Lance had imagination plus, and now it was most desperately needful that he reach Marokee, for anxiety and terror spurred him each hour. Shortly before dawn they heard planes heading eastward, high up, on another raid; this touch with life cheered Lance tremendously. That cablegram burned in his pocket and was burned into his brain.

The message had arrived at the very last moment, as he was going out to take his place in the Blenheim. There was no chance to reply then. An hour or two would not matter, he had thought, they would be back shortly after sunrise. But they were not back; and now time was mattering most horribly. The lines graven in the quiet, poised, intellectual features were not from physical suffering; it is not our own hurts that bite the deepest.

Behind Lance lay Canada and a college universe of small horizons. In that forgotten past he had been a professor of Romance Languages. He was spending a sabbatical year in Paris, with his wife, when the war flared. He went into the air force, was sent out here to the near east. And now the French had collapsed, Paris was being bombed, and time would not wait for him.

He must have groaned unconsciously, for Facini glanced around and turned to him.

"Feet bad?" he asked. They had left the morning's camp behind. The gorge was a blaze of refracted heat. Lance straightened and tried to wipe the haunted look from his eyes.

"Oh, they might be worse. I'm all right, really," he said in French.

"*Tiens!*" Facini's face lit up. "Sit down and let me show you a trick, comrade. This accursed uniform jacket—glad to be rid of it." He called to Erne and Hawkins. "Go ahead, we'll catch up. I'm going to help his feet a bit."

The others went on. Facini chattered away gaily; Lance, who could think in French, made answer. A fine chap, this, Lance thought; the best type of southern Frenchman. Facini was slitting up his jacket while Lance got out of his footgear, cut and mangled by rocks.

"We'll fix that. Ah!" Facini, beginning to bandage the right foot with a strip of cloth, paused. "Blood, eh? Your feet are cut."

"No matter. Some things hurt worse than cuts."

Facini shrugged gravely and continued his work. The boots, replaced over the bandaged feet, had to be left unlaced. Lance stepped out and spoke joyously.

"Why, it's like having new feet! Facini, you're a miracle worker!"

He pressed the other's arm. Facini looked into his eyes and smiled. Lance could feel the friendly, intimate thrill that passed between them; it pleased him enormously.

"What can hurt worse?" queried Facini, as they took up the rugged way.

"Inability to help those dependent on us." Lance knew what most gratifies the Latin heart: to be told inner things and reasons, to be admitted to the precincts of the heart. So, striding onward, he confided in Facini. It helped him to do so, too; he held nothing back.

"The cable came just as we were leaving. My wife, you see, in Paris. I thought it announced the birth of a son, a daughter—we were sure it would be a boy. Instead, it said that she needed money desperately, that I must cable her some, so she could reach England. I can do it by wireless from Marokee, if we get there, if it's not too late, too late! God knows what's happening in Paris! She had funds. Something must have gone wrong."

"It is sad," Facini said very soberly. "Worse than sad, for a woman pregnant. But I do not think Paris will be bombed.

Captured, yes—bombed, no. The news last night said it had been declared an open city."

"That does not lighten my burden," replied Lance. Still, talking things over did help tremendously. He showed Facini her picture, in the black, skin-soft money belt a friend had sent him from Toronto.

Although he perfectly comprehended the process, he was astonished at how deeply this confidence impressed Facini and awakened a warmth of responsiveness. Facini went into rather intimate detail about the girl in Mentone, about the family; and in the course of this let slip his feelings in a way Lance was too astute to miss.

"Good heavens, man! You're not a communist, surely?"

"No, but I might well be a fascist," Facini said drily. "Do you think Savoy is French? Far from it. We were annexed to France by force. Socially, industrially, civilly, we are bedeviled by the French. They strangle us with embraces."

"I didn't know France was an oppressor," Lance rejoined.

"Any undesired ruler is an oppressor," said Facini. Lance gave him a curious glance, then stumbled and a cry of pain escaped him. A jagged bit of rock, needle-sharp, had ripped half the left boot away and gashed his instep.

They halted again. Facini made a remarkably efficient job of the bandaging, using the last fragments of his jacket. Against these rocks, he observed, the tough cloth was more enduring than the soft leather. When these bandages were worn through, the English tunics would replace them.

"MAROKEE can't be more than a few miles away," said Jock Erne. "We'll reach it before night. Damn it, we must! Too much depends on it. We must!"

Since mid-morning of the third day, they had been camped here amid the ancient walls. Lance slept; even in repose his face was worn and haggard. Gunner Hawkins slept with uneasy stirrings; fever was in his blood, his neck was anguished, and lack of water had hit him cruelly. Erne's gaze touched them anxiously, then went to Facini, who shrugged.

"So it's not far, eh?"

"Only a few miles." Erne stabbed at the map with a finger. "This must be the Roman station of Mons Alba, indicated here. Look at the walls! You can trace the enclosure for animals, the cisterns, the defense wall. Marble from here built the monuments of antiquity; now it's empty desolation, even the roads forgotten. Well, wake 'em up, will you? I've one cigarette all around, before we get off."

Erne's gaunt, hard-chiseled features were blurred with beard, as were all four faces. He knew the others were suffering. He had driven them mercilessly, had driven himself as well. He was suffering more; his bullet-ripped arm, inflamed, was plaguing him with a thirst that could not be quenched.

Facini wakened the others. They joined him; he held his cigarette case open, mutely. A final smoke all around. Facini produced vestas, tiny waxed slivers. Cigarettes alight, the four relaxed, and Erne tossed his empty cigarette case away with a clatter.

"Odd matches," he said, inspecting one of the tiny vestas.

"Kind you see in Italy," said Lance. "Nowhere else, as a rule."

Erne wondered at Facini's startled expression, then forgot the matter.

"Not too far to go, lads," he announced. "We'll see Marokee before dark. We must!" He saw they were too far gone for any enthusiasm. He tried to spur them, in vain. A hard, quick ring came into his voice. "I want to get there more than any of you; I must, I shall get there! Nothing on this damned earth can stop me, either! So up and at it."

They staggered up obediently and were off anew. Erne was devoutly thankful that the ravine led northward and had a slight down grade. Twice this morning they had crossed the rocky slopes, to keep direction; to do it again would be impossible.

Left arm in its sling, he strode on without a limp, though his feet were badly cut. Facini, with a burst of energy, caught up and spoke thickly, rolling a pebble in his mouth.

"You're confident nothing can stop you. Why? Why must you reach Marokee?"

"Destiny!" Erne's thin lips curved. He liked this wiry, gay-hearted man who had kept abreast of them and never a word of grousing or complaint. "Life, for one thing; I mean to live. Then I must reach there to send a wireless message. It's imperative."

"Oh!" said Facini. "A woman, eh?"

"Hell, no!" Erne laughed harshly. "To the air ministry. They've been working on an idea of mine; an entirely new system of gun sighting and mounting, with a basic structural design that'll permit the use of long range guns, accurately! You'll see a two-seater sit on the clouds well beyond range and blow hell out of Messerschmidts and Capronis. They'll be so far out-ranged that they'll be helpless!"

"*Dieu!*" Facini's eyes widened. "It's perfected?"

"One thing wrong about the sighting mechanism; it's held the whole thing back. Well, I've got the answer! It came to me night before last. I've worked it over in my mind. I've got it, absolutely! Twenty words wirelessed to the air ministry will change the whole war in the air. That's why I must get to Marokee . . . I must, I shall! I can't be stopped!"

It was unusually bad, even for this frightful road. They had come to patches of fallen stone and rubble that filled the bottom of the gorge, choking the way. One had to climb along. Thank the lord it was not upgrade! Erne glanced back at Lance and Hawkins; they were dragging themselves along with a horrible wavering effort. His voice pealed cheerily and bravely to encourage them.

The words ended in a gasp. A stone turned under his foot; his foot went down; he went down. Up again, only to stagger and catch himself, and stand on one foot. He knew instantly what it was; a bad twist of the ankle. Facini knew, too. He caught Erne's arm.

"Down! Sit down, quickly! Every instant counts!"

Erne obeyed and Facini knelt, fumbling at the boot, at the laces; already the ankle was swelling enormously, Erne perceived. He looked up, as Hawkins and Lance came weaving along like sleepwalkers. His voice stabbed at them.

"On you go, lads; keep moving! We'll overtake you presently. Nothing but a turned ankle." He watched them plod on and away. Then he spoke to Facini, a quiver in his words. "Off with you!" he said softly. "I'll rest a bit, then come along. You keep going."

Facini laughed a little. "You know better; so do I. You'll go with me. Too bad we've no water to reduce the inflammation. Nothing broken. Now I'll have to hurt you, but that's the only way to spread the blood and help the foot."

The sun was blazing down. The afternoon heat, in this little world of naked rock, was terrific. Both men were heat-parched, incapable of perspiration. None the less, Erne felt sweat gather on his brow as Facini worked shrewdly, gently manipulating ankle and leg.

Erne was close to panic; his boast that nothing could stop him had been shattered, for he was stopped. He no longer kept up the front that had driven them all so relentlessly; his will-power was futile. Then he realized that Facini was looking up at him and smiling, and speaking again.

"You'll get there. You think you can't touch foot to ground, but you will. We'll leave your boot and use your tunic to build up a bandage. Same as Lance."

He kneaded and massaged while he spoke. Erne, feeling weak and sick, shed his tunic. Facini slit the cloth and made it into a huge pad about the foot and ankle.

"May find a stick later to help you hobble," he said. "None around here. Up you get, now! Hang on to my arm. You'll do famously. You must!"

Erne suppressed a groan as he came erect; then his iron will reacted. He was himself again. Grimly silent, he hobbled on, step upon step, his head swimming.

Ahead, the gorge widened and swung in a sharply angled curve. There they came upon the other two men. Lance had dropped and was shaking with helpless sobs. Hawkins was sitting beside him, and looked up at them with fever-bright eyes.

"Gimme a 'and wif 'im," he croaked.

Erne's brain cleared; he felt Facini press his hand and heard the composed voice.

"Stay here, Erne; they need you. I'll go on; it can't be far now. I'll get there and send back help."

Erne lowered himself to the stones. His breath came in a wheeze of futility; he was done.

NEW vigor filled Facini as he strode down the gorge, alone. It widened, but it also curved again. His weariness fell away; exultation surged and surged upon him.

He knew what lay ahead, for today was the 24th. No later than the 20th, they had promised him; Marokee was now in Italian hands. And what a tremendous thing he had accomplished, all unexpectedly! Erne was helpless, was safe for gathering in; this man, and the thing he had invented . . . all useless to England now!

Eagerness grew in his soul. The blackshirts and askaris would welcome him; his name would be known to the officers. In Marokee, in Italian East, back in Italy, he would be a man famed and. . . .

He halted abruptly, motionless, staring. The gorge had opened. There, half a mile away, he saw Marokee on its little flat-topped plateau.

He could see masses of men at work. No flag was flying; too bad he had not brought Erne's binoculars! However, there was no need. Below the plateau, other squads were going back and forth. Somewhere, a machine-gun rattled. His breath leaped in a gusty shout; taken, taken! Italy was here!

Facini broke into a flurried, stumbling run. Down the gorge, amid huge piled rocks, something moved; a man stepped out. Facini saw the black features. An askari! Wild with jubilation, he whipped up his revolver and fired again and again, in the air, saluting.

"*Viva!*" The hoarse shout burst from him. "*Viva Italia! Viva Italia!*"

Half a dozen rifle-shots cracked from among the rocks. Pealing metallic echoes filled the gorge; Facini spun about and fell.

He opened his eyes, flutteringly. He lay bandaged; a white officer knelt beside him. His brain cleared. A blank, terrible look came into his face; incredulity overwhelmed him. English! Black men, yes, but not askaris; King's African Rifles . . . he knew the uniform.

"Hell! Do you speak English?" the officer was saying.

"Yes, yes, of course," murmured Facini. The officer looked startled.

"Damned sorry; what made you shoot at us and yell in Italian? You're not one of them? We're mopping up, you know. The jackals jumped us last night. Damned near got us, but we've settled their hash. I say, where d'ye come from?"

Facini looked up, tried to speak; he could only groan.

"You're passing out," said the officer gently. "Deuced sorry. Tell me what I can do for you. Anything we can do. . . ."

Facini's brain reacted to the words in a startling flash. Dying! Then, even dying, he could still strike back at England!

They were done, back there; Erne was done and could not struggle on. With him would perish the thing he had invented.

Victory, even in defeat! There was the greatest blow that could be struck for Italy; struck without a word, struck in silence. Even a dying man could strike such a blow—it would mean the war won for Italy!

Then it was like the opening of a gate in his mind, and sunlight flooding in. What matter the war? Hawkins was in a bad way, would perish back among the rocks; Hawkins, who had saved his life. Poor Hawkins! Still, it was war.

And Lance. Ah, that was different! Lance must send that message; Lance, his friend, the brave and gentle fellow who suffered for love of those he could not help. Yes, Lance must be helped, for the sake of that woman and unborn child in Paris. Hawkins must be helped —it was the least a man could do.

"Pray for us, now and in the hour of our death . . ." Facini clutched the officer's sleeve with convulsive fingers. His voice gathered strength. "Three men—English, a mile or two—up the ravine. Bomber crashed—get help to them—all hurt. . . ."

He sighed, and his head lolled. Peace stole into his haggard, blurred features.

THE SOUL OF A REGIMENT

By TALBOT MUNDY

(This story appeared originally in *Adventure* in 1912, and was reprinted by request in 1917 and 1935. It appears here again on *Adventure's* thirtieth anniversary, picked from these thirty years of stories as the one that stays strongest in the memory. See Camp-Fire.)

SO LONG as its colors remain, and there is one man left to carry them, a regiment will continue the same old traditions behind it and the same atmosphere surrounding it that made brave men of its forebears. So, although the colors are not exactly the soul of the regiment, they are the concrete embodiment of it, and are even more sacred than the person of a reigning sovereign.

The First Egyptian Foot had colors—and has them still, thanks to Billy Grogram; so the First Egyptian Foot is still a regiment. It was the very first of all the regiments raised in Egypt, and the colors were lovely crimson things on a brand-new polished pole, cased in the regulation jacket of black water-proof, and housed with all pomp and ceremony in the messroom at the barracks.

There were people who said that it was bad policy to present colors to a native regiment; that they were nothing more than a symbol of a decadent and waning monarchism in any case, and that the respect which would be due them might lead dangerously near to fetish-worship. As a matter of cold fact, though, the raw recruits of the regiment failed utterly to understand them, and it was part of Billy Grogram's business to instil in them a wholesome respect for the

sacred symbol of regimental honor.

He was Sergeant-Instructor William Stanford Grogram, V.C., D.S.M., to give him his full name and title, late a sergeant-major of the True and Tried, time expired, and retired from service on a pension. His pension would have been enough for him to live on, for he was unmarried, his habits were exemplary, and his wants were few; but an elder brother of his had been a ne'er-do-well, and Grogram, who was of the type that will die rather than let any one of his depend on charity, left the army with a sister-in-law and a small tribe of children dependent on him. Work, of course, was the only thing for it, and he applied promptly for the only kind of work that he knew how to do.

The British are always making new regiments out of native material in some part of the world; they come cheaper than white troops, and, with a sprinkling of white troops in among them, they do wonderfully good service in time of war —thanks to the sergeant-instructors. The officers get the credit for it, but it is ex-non-commissioned officers of the Line who do the work, as Grogram was destined to discover. They sent him out to instruct the First Egyptian Foot and it turned out to be the toughest proposition that any one lonely, determined, homesick fighting-man ever ran up against.

He was not looking for a life of idleness and ease, so the discomfort of his new quarters did not trouble him overmuch, though they would have disgusted another man at the very beginning. They gave him a little, whitewashed, mud-walled hut, with two bare rooms in it, and a lovely view on three sides of aching desert sand; on the fourth was a blind wall.

It was as hot inside as a baker's oven, but it had the one great advantage of being easily kept clean, and Grogram, whose fetish was cleanliness, bore that in mind, and forbore to grumble at the absence of a sergeants' mess and the various creature comforts that his position had entitled him to for years.

What did disgust him, though, was the unfairness of saddling the task that lay in front of him on the shoulders of one lone man; his officers made it quite clear that they had no intention of helping him in the least; from the colonel downward they were ashamed of the regiment, and they expected Grogram to work it into something like shape before they even began to take an interest in it.

The colonel went even further than that; he put in an appearance at Orderly Room every morning and once a week attended a parade out on the desert where nobody could see the awful evolutions of his raw command, but he actually threw cold water on Grogram's efforts at enthusiasm.

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," he told him a few mornings after Grogram joined, "or well-drilled soldiers out of Gyppies. Heaven only knows what the Home Government means by trying to raise a regiment out here; at the very best we'll be only teaching the enemy to fight us! But you'll find they won't learn. However, until the Government finds out what a ghastly mistake's being made, there's nothing for it but to obey orders and drill Gyppies. Go ahead, Grogram; I give you a free hand. Try anything you like on them, but don't ask me to believe there'll be any result from it. Candidly I don't."

BUT Grogram happened to be a different type of man from his new colonel. After a conversation such as that, he could have let things go hang had he chosen to, drawing his pay, doing his six hours' work a day along the line of least resistance, and blaming the inevitable consequences on the colonel. But to him a duty was something to be done; and impossibility was something to set his clean-shaven, stubborn jaw at and overcome; and a regiment was a regiment, to be kneaded and pummelled and damned and coaxed and drilled, till it began to look as the True and Tried used to look in the days when he was sergeant-major.

So he twisted his little brown mustache and drew himself up to the full height of his five feet, eight inches, spread his well-knit shoulders, straightened his ramrod of a back and got busy

on the job, while his colonel and the other officers did the social rounds in Cairo and cursed their luck. The material that Grogram had to work with were *feelaheen*—good, honest, coal-black Negroes, giants in stature, the embodiment of good-humored incompetence, children of the soil weaned on rawhide whips under the blight of Turkish misrule and Arab cruelty. They had no idea that they were even men till Grogram taught them; and he had to learn Arabic first before he could teach them even that.

They began by fearing him, as their ancestors had feared every new breed of taskmaster for centuries; gradually they learned to look for an instant and amazing justice at his hand, and from then on they respected him. He caned them instead of getting them fined by the colonel or punished with pack-drill for failing at things they did not understand; they were thoroughly accustomed to the lash, and his light swagger-cane laid on their huge shoulders was a joke that served merely to point his argument and fix his lessons in their memories; they would not have understood the colonel's wrath had he known that the men of his regiment were being beaten by a non-commissioned officer.

They began to love him when he harked back to the days when he was a recruit himself, and remembered the steps of a double-shuffle that he had learned in the barrack-room; when he danced a buck-and-wing dance for them they recognized him as a man and a brother, and from that time on, instead of giving him all the trouble they could and laughing at his lectures when his back was turned, they genuinely tried to please him.

So he studied out more steps, and danced his way into their hearts, growing daily stricter on parade, daily more exacting of pipe-clay and punctuality, and slowly, but surely as the march of time, molding them into something like a regiment.

Even he could not teach them to shoot, though he sweated over them on the dazzling range until the sun dried every drop of sweat out of him. And for a long time he could not even teach them to march; they would keep step for a hundred yards or so and then lapse into the listless, shrinking stride that was the birthright of centuries.

He pestered the colonel for a band of sorts until the colonel told him angrily to go to blazes; then he wrote home and purchased six fifes with his own money, bought a native drum in the bazaar, and started a band on his own account.

Had he been able to read music himself he would have been no better off, because, of course, the *fellaheen* he had to teach could not have read it either, though possibly he might have slightly increased the number of tunes in their repertoire.

As it was, he knew only two tunes himself—"The Campbells Are Coming," and the national anthem.

He picked the six most intelligent men he could find and whistled those two tunes to them until his lips were dry and his cheeks ached and his very soul revolted at the sound of them. But the six men picked them up; and, of course, any negro in the world can beat a drum. One golden morning before the sun had heated up the desert air the regiment marched past in really good formation, all in step, and tramping to the tune of "God Save The Queen."

The colonel nearly had a fit, but the regiment tramped on and the band played them back to barracks with a swing and rhythm that was new not only to the First Egyptian Foot; it was new to Egypt! The tune was half a tone flat maybe, and the drum was a sheep-skin business bought in the bazaar, but a new regiment marched behind it. And behind the regiment—two paces right flank, as the regulations specify—marched a sergeant-instructor with a new light in his eyes—the gray eyes that had looked out so wearily from beneath the shaggy eyebrows, and that shone now with the pride of a deed well done.

OF COURSE the colonel was still scornful. But Billy Grogram, who had handled men when the colonel was cutting his teeth at Sandhurst, and who knew

men from the bottom up, knew that the mob of unambitious countrymen who had grinned at him in uncomfortable silence when he first arrived, was beginning to forget its mobdom. He, who spent his hard-earned leisure talking to them and answering their childish questions in hard-won Arabic, knew that they were slowly grasping the theory of the thing—that a soul was forming in the regiment—an indefinible, unexplainable, but obvious change, perhaps not unlike the change from infancy to manhood.

And Billy Grogram, who above all was a man of clean ideals, began to feel content. He still described them in his letters home as "blooming mummies made of Nile mud, roasted black for their sins, and good for nothing but the ash-heap." He still damned them on parade, whipped them when the colonel wasn't looking, and worked at them until he was much too tired to sleep; but he began to love them.

And to a big, black, grinning man of them they loved him.

And to encourage that wondrous band of his, he set them to playing their two tunes on guest nights outside the officers' mess; and the officers endured it until the colonel returned from furlough. He sent for Grogram and offered to pay all he had spent on instruments, provided the band should keep away in future.

Grogram refused the money and took the hint, inventing weird and hitherto unheard-of reasons why it should be unrighteous for the band to play outside the mess. Like all great men he knew when he had made a mistake, and how to minimize it.

His hardest task was teaching the Gyppies what their colors meant. The men were Mohammedans; they lived in Allah; they had been taught from the time when they were old enough to speak that idols and the outward symbols of religion are the sign of heresy; and Grogram's lectures, delivered in stammering and uncertain Arabic, seemed to them like the ground-plan of a new religion. But Grogram stuck to it. He made opportunities for saluting the colors and treated them with an ostentatious respect that would have been laughed at among his own people.

When his day's work was done and he was too tired to dance for them, he would tell them long tales, done into halting Arabic, of how regiments had died rallying round their colors; of a brand-new paradise, invented by himself and suitable to all religions, where soldiers went who honored their colors, as they ought to do; of the honor that befell a man who died fighting for them, and of the tenfold honor of the man whose privilege it was to carry them into action.

And in the end, although they did not understand him, they respected the colors because he told them to.

WHEN England hovered on the brink of indecision and sent her greatest general to hold Khartum with only a handful of native troops to help him, the First Egyptian Foot refused to leave their gaudy crimson rag behind them. They marched with colors flying down to the steamer that was to take them on the first long stage of their journey up the Nile, and there were six fifes and a drum in front of them that told whoever cared to listen that "The Campbells were coming—hurrah! hurrah!"

They marched with the measured tramp of a real regiment; they carried their chins high; their tarbooshes were cocked at a knowing angle, and they swung from the hips like grown men. At the head of the regiment rode a colonel whom the regiment scarcely knew, and beside it marched a dozen officers in like predicament; and behind it, his sword strapped to his side and his little swagger-cane tucked under his left arm-pit, marched Sergeant-Instructor Grogram, whom the regiment knew and loved, and who had made and knew the regiment.

The whole civilized world knows—and England knows to her enduring shame—what befell General Gordon and his handful of men when they reached Khartum. Gordon surely guessed what was in store for him even before he started, his subordinates may have done so, and the native soldiers knew. But Ser-

geant-Instructor Grogram neither knew or cared. He looked no further than his duty, which was to nurse the big black babies of his regiment and to keep them good-tempered, grinning and efficient; he did that as no other living man could have done it, and kept on doing it to the bitter end.

And his task can have been no sinecure. The *Mahdi*—the ruthless terror of the Upper Nile who ruled by systematized and savage cruelty and lived by plunder—was as much a bogy to peaceful Egypt as Napoleon used to be to Europe, and with far more reason. Mothers frightened their children into prompt obedience by the mere mention of his name, and the coal-black natives of the Nile-mouth country are never more than grown-up children.

It must have been as easy to take that regiment to Khartum as to take a horse into a burning building, but when they reached there not a man was missing; they marched in with colors flying and their six-fife band playing, and behind them—two paces right flank rear—marched Billy Grogram, his swagger-cane under his left arm-pit, neat, respectful and very wide-awake.

For a little while Cairo kept in touch with them, and then communications ceased. Nobody ever learned all the details of the tragedy that followed; there was a curtain drawn of mystery and silence such as has always veiled the heart of darkest Africa.

Lord Wolseley took his expedition up the Nile, whipped the Dervishes at El Teb and Tel-el-Kebir, and reached Khartum, to learn of Gordon's death, but not the details of it. Then he came back again; and the *Mahdi* followed him, closing up the route behind him, wiping all trace of civilization off the map and placing what he imagined was an insuperable barrier between him and the British—a thousand miles of plundered, ravished, depopulated wilderness.

So a clerk in a musty office drew a line below the record of the First Egyptian Foot; widows were duly notified; a pension or two was granted; and the regiment that Billy Grogram had worked so hard to build was relegated to the past, like Billy Grogram.

RUMORS had come back along with Wolseley's men that Grogram had gone down fighting with his regiment; there was a story that the band had been taken alive and turned over to the *Mahdi's* private service, and one prisoner, taken near Khartum, swore that he had seen Grogram speared as he lay wounded before the Residency. There was a battalion of the True and Tried with Wolseley, and the men used methods that may have been not strictly ethical in seeking tidings of their old sergeant-major; but even they could get no further details; he had gone down fighting with his regiment, and that was all about him.

Then men forgot him. The long steady preparation soon began for the new campaign that was to wipe the *Mahdi* off the map, restore peace to Upper Egypt, regain Khartum and incidentally avenge Gordon. Regiments were slowly drafted out from home as barracks could be built for them; new regiments of native troops were raised and drilled by ex-sergeants of the Line who never heard of Grogram; new men took charge; and the *Sirdar* superintended everything and laid his reputation brick by brick, of bricks which he made himself, and men were too busy under him to think of anything except the work in hand.

But rumors kept coming in, as they always do in Egypt, filtering in from nowhere over the illimitable desert, borne by stray camel-drivers, carried by Dervish spies, tossed from tongue to tongue through the fish-market, and carried up back stairs to clubs and department offices. There were tales of a drummer and three men who played the fife and a wonderful mad *Feringee* who danced as no man surely ever danced before. The tales varied, but there were always four musicians and a *Feringee*.

When one Dervish spy was caught and questioned he swore by the beard of the Prophet that he had seen the men himself. He was told promptly that he was a liar. How came it that a *Feringee* —a pork-fed infidel Englishman—should be allowed to live anywhere where the *Mahdi's* long arm reached?

"Whom God hath touched—" the

Dervish quoted; and men remembered that madness is the surest passport throughout the whole of northern Africa. But nobody connected Grogram with the *Feringee* who danced.

But another man was captured who told a similar tale; and then a Greek trader, turned Mohammedan to save his skin, who had made good his escape from the *Mahdi's* camp. He swore to having seen this man as he put in one evening at a Nile-bank village in a native *dhow*. He was dressed in an ancient khaki tunic and a loin-cloth; he was bare-legged, shoeless, and his hair was long over his shoulders and plastered thick with mud. No, he did not look in the least like a British soldier, though he danced as soldiers sometimes did beside the camp-fires.

Three natives who were with him played fifes while the *Feringee* danced, and one man beat a drum. Yes, the tunes were English tunes, though very badly played; he had heard them before, and recognized them. No, he could not hum them; he knew no music. Why had he not spoken to the man who danced? He had not dared. The man appeared to be a prisoner and so were the natives with him; the man had danced that evening until he could dance no longer, and then the Dervishes had beaten him with a *koorbash* for encouragement; the musicians had tried to interfere, and they had all been beaten and left lying there for dead. He was not certain, but he was almost certain they were dead before he came away.

Then, more than three years after Gordon died, there came another rumor, this time from close at hand—somewhere in the neutral desert zone that lay between the Dervish outpost and the part of Lower Egypt that England held. This time the dancer was reported to be dying, but the musicians were still with him. They got the name of the dancer this time; it was reported to be Goglam, and though that was not at all a bad native guess for Grogram, nobody apparently noted the coincidence.

Men were too busy with their work; the rumor was only one of a thousand that filtered across the desert every month, and nobody remembered the non-commissioned officer who had left for Khartum with the First Egyptian Foot; they would have recalled the names of all the officers almost without an effort, but not Grogram's.

EGYPT was busy with the hum of building — empire-building under a man who knew his job. Almost the only game the *Sirdar* countenanced was polo, and that only because it kept officers and civilians fit. He gave them all the polo, though, that they wanted, and men grew keen on it, spent money on it, and needless to say, grew extraordinarily proficient.

And with proficiency of course came competition — matches between regiments for the regimental cup, and finally the biggest event of the Cairo season, the match between the Civil Service and the Army of Occupation, or, as it was more usually termed, The Army *vs.* the Rest." That was the one society event that the *Sirdar* made a point of presiding over in person.

He attended it in *mufti* always, but sat in the seat of honor, just outside the touch-line, half way down the field; and behind him, held back by ropes, clustered the whole of Cairene society, on foot, on horseback and in dog-cars, buggies, gigs and every kind of carriage imaginable. Opposite, and at either end, the garrison lined up—all the British and native troops rammed in together; and the native population crowded in between them wherever they could find standing-room.

It was the one event of the year for which all Egypt, Christian and Mohammedan, took a holiday. Regimental bands were there to play before the game and between the chukkers, and nothing was left undone that would in any way tend to make the event spectacular.

Two games had been played since the cup had been first presented by the Khedive, and honors lay even—one match for the Army and one for the Civil Service. So on the third anniversary feeling ran fairly high. It ran higher still when half time was called and honors still lay even at the goal all; to judge by the excitement of the crowd,

a stranger might have guessed that polo was the most important thing in Egypt. The players rode off to the pavilion for the half-time interval, and the infantry band that came out on to the field was hard put to it to drown the noise of conversation and laughter and argument. At that minute there was surely nothing in the world to talk about but polo.

But suddenly the band stopped playing, as suddenly as if the music were a concrete thing and had been severed with an ax. The *Sirdar* turned his head suddenly and gazed at one corner of the field, and the noise of talking ceased—not so suddenly as the music had done, for not everybody could see what was happening at first—but dying down gradually and fading away to nothing as the amazing thing came into view.

It was a detachment of five men—a drummer and three fifes, and one other man who marched behind them—though he scarcely resembled a man. He marched, though, like a British soldier.

He was ragged—they all were—dirty and unkempt. He seemed very nearly starved, for his bare legs were thinner than a mummy's; round his loins was a native loincloth, and his hair was plastered down with mud like a religious fanatic's. His only other garment was a tattered khaki tunic that might once have been a soldier's, and he wore no shoes or sandals of any kind.

He marched, though, with a straight back and his chin up, and anybody who was half observant might have noticed that he was marching two paces right flank rear; it is probable, though, that in the general amazement, nobody did notice it.

As the five debouched upon the polo-ground, four of them abreast, the one behind issued a sharp command, the right-hand man thumped his drum, and a wail proceeded from the fifes. They swung into a regimental quick-step now, and the wail grew louder, rising and falling fitfully and distinctly keeping time with the drum.

Then the tune grew recognizable. The crowd listened now in awestruck silence. The five approaching figures were grotesque enough to raise a laugh and the tune was grotesquer, and more pitiable still; but there was something electric in the atmosphere that told of tragedy, and not even the natives made a sound as the five marched straight across the field to where the *Sirdar* sat beneath the Egyptian flag.

Louder and louder grew the tune as the fifes warmed up to it; louder thumped the drum. It was flat, and notes were missing here and there. False notes appeared at unexpected intervals, but the tune was unmistakable. "The Campbells Are Coming! Hurrah! Hurrah!" wailed the three fifes, and the five men marched to it as no undrilled natives ever did.

"Halt!" ordered the man behind, when the strange cortège had reached the *Sirdar;* and his "Halt!" rang out in good clean, military English.

"Front!" he ordered, and they "fronted" like a regiment. "Right dress!" They were in line already, but they went through the formality of shuffling their feet. "Eyes front!" The five men faced the *Sirdar,* and no one breathed. "General salute—pre-sent arms!"

They had not arms. The band stood still at attention. The fifth man—he of the bare legs and plastered hair—whipped his right hand to his forehead in regulation military salute—held it there for the regulation six seconds, swaying as he did so and tottering from the knees, then whipped it to his side again and stood at rigid attention. He seemed able to stand better that way, for his knees left off shaking.

"Who are you?" asked the *Sirdar* then.

"The First Egyptian Foot, sir."

The crowd behind was leaning forward, listening; those that had been near enough to hear that gasped. The *Sirdar's* face changed suddenly to the look of cold indifference behind which a certain type of Englishman hides his emotion.

Then came the time-honored question, prompt as the ax of a guillotine—inevitable as Fate itself:

"Where are your colors?"

The fifth man—he who had issued the commands—fumbled with his tunic. The buttons were missing, and the front of it was fastened up with string; his fingers seemed to have grown feeble; he plucked

at it, but it would not come undone.

"Where are—"

The answer to that question should be like an echo, and nobody should need to ask it twice. But the string burst suddenly, and the first time of asking sufficed. The ragged, unkempt, long-haired mummy undid his tunic, and pulled it open.

"Here, sir!" he answered.

The colors, blood-soaked, torn—unrecognizable almost—were round his body! As the ragged tunic fell apart, the colors fell with it; Grogram caught them, and stood facing the *Sirdar* with them in his hand. His bare chest was scarred with half-healed wounds and criss-crossed with the marks of floggings, and his skin seemed to be drawn tight as a mummy's across his ribs. He was a living skeleton!

The *Sirdar* sprang to his feet and raised his hat; for the colors of a regiment are second, in holiness, to the symbols of the church. The watching, listening crowd followed suit; there was a sudden rustling as a sea of hats and helmets rose and descended.

The band of four, that had stood in stolid silence while all this was happening, realized that the moment was auspicious to play their other tune.

They had only one other, and they had played "The Campbells Are Coming" across the polo-field; so up went the fifes, "Bang!" went the drum, and, "God Save Our Gracious Queen" wailed the three in concert, while strong men hid their faces and women sobbed.

Grogram whipped his hand up to the answering salute, faced the crowd in front of him for six palpitating seconds, and fell dead at the *Sirdar's* feet.

AND so they buried him; his shroud was the flag that had flown above the *Sirdar* at the ever-memorable match, and his soul went into the regiment.

They began recruiting it again next day round the blood-soaked colors he had carried with him, and the First Egyptian Foot did famously at the Atbara and Omdurman. They buried him in a hollow square formed by massed brigades, European and native regiments alternating, and saw him on his way with twenty-one parting volleys, instead of the regulation five. His tombstone is a monolith of rough-hewn granite, tucked away in a quiet corner of the European graveyard at Cairo—quiet and inconspicuous as Grogram always was—but the truth is graven on it in letters two inches deep:

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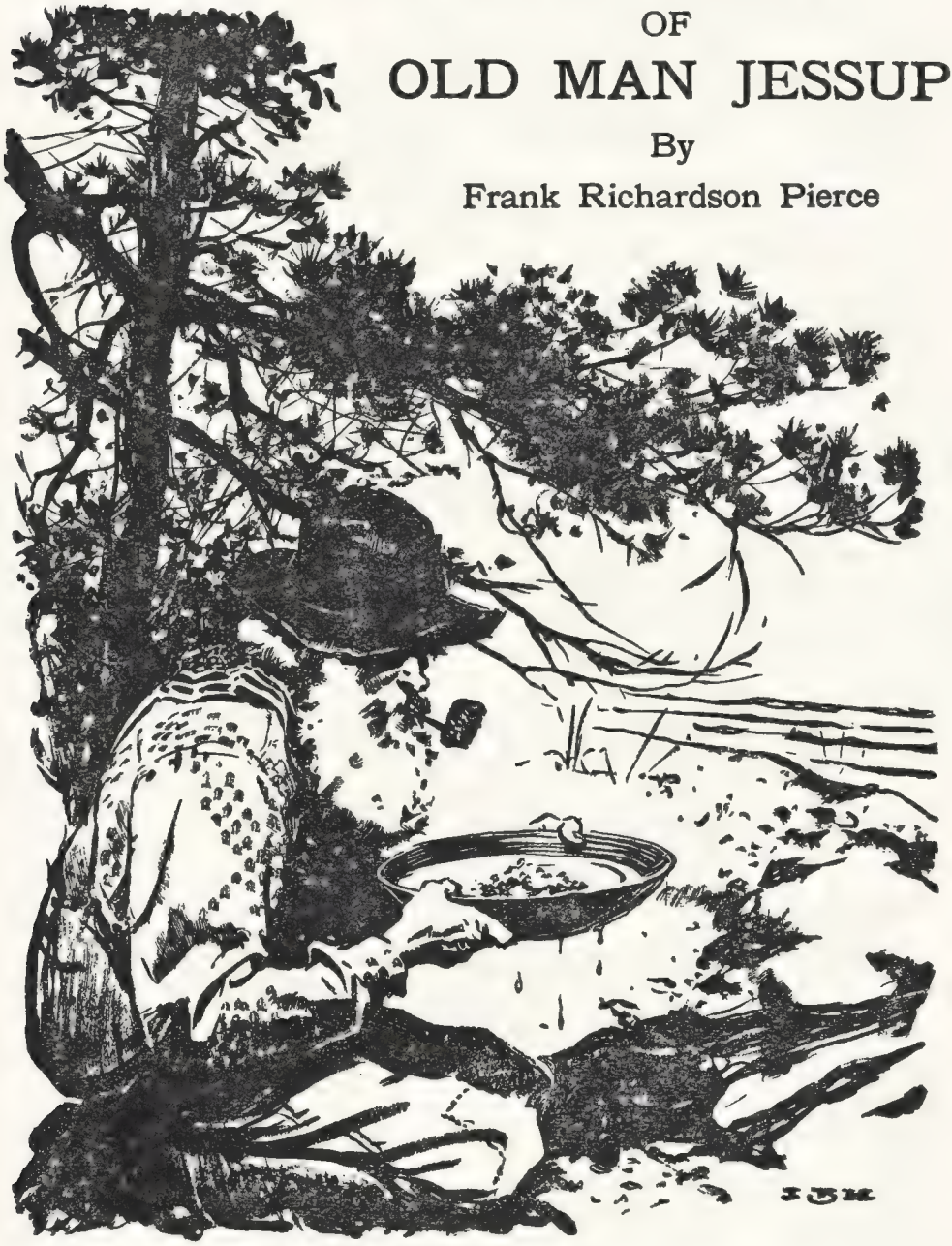
THE ABATEMENT OF OLD MAN JESSUP

By Frank Richardson Pierce



"Knowed it was there all the time. . . ."

WHEN sourdoughs and pioneer Alaskans elected Bull-Fiddle Mike Trent mayor of Cold Deck over the Greater Cold Deck reform ticket, he took the oath of office and made a speech. In the speech he indicated the people had given him a mandate to leave civic affairs as they had been for nearly forty years. He trusted, he said, the people's rebuke at the polls would

effectively silence the Cheechakos, or newcomers, who were trying to streamline an old, established mining camp. He trusted a lot of other things, too, in the course of his speech.

Twenty-four hours after election he realized that his trust was resting on a broken reed, that victory leaves a certain type of reformer bewildered and empty-handed, whereas defeat is food, shelter and clothing.

Bull-Fiddle was a vest-pocket edition of the legendary he-man of the North. He stood five feet two inches and weighed a little over a hundred pounds. He believed in and admired big things. He smoked big cigars, wore big overcoats and lived in a big house on a high hill. He had stampeded in '98, bought a team of big dogs and started a transportation business. His nickname had come from his love of the bass viol.

The single dog team had expanded into many and from that he had moved on to a fleet of planes carrying freight and passengers all over Alaska. His code was simple: "If you're going to lose your shirt, it is better to lose it in a blue chip game than in penny-ante."

For forty-odd years he had taken chances on the biggest jobs, but now he was wondering if the mayor's job might prove more than he could handle. The reformers were flooding his desk with petitions and backing them up with mass appearances. Each one made a real sourdough see red.

On a raw day he carried a number of petitions to the council chamber. As mayor, the camp charter required him to preside over the august body and cast the deciding vote in case of a tie.

As he placed the petition on the clerk's desk and rapped for order, the leaders of the new faction entered in a body. He moaned audibly as he noticed they were accompanied by a lady lawyer now practicing in the camp. Her name was Tessie Trumbull, and already alimony dodgers were calling her Terrible Tessie. She was a lovely blonde, full of vim, vigor, vitality, determination and intelligence.

"Mr. Mayor," she began briskly, "my clients demand that the main street be planked. The mud is so deep a man wearing a stove-pipe hat could sink from view in a few seconds."

Bull-Fiddle didn't believe in women lawyers and doctors, but Tessie was quite a figure of a girl, and curiosity prompted him to give her a little rope and scan the result. He said mildly, "Street'll be all right after the freeze-up. No sense in wastin' money plankin! Besides, tourists claim it's atmosphere."

"Speaking of tourists," Tessie said, unperturbed by defeat, "brings us to the next item. I refer to the row of cabins on the river bank. My clients feel the cabins and their occupants are a nuisance that should be abated. Tourists landing from river steamers pass the cabins on their way to the camp proper. It is embarrassing, to say the least."

"Girls ain't been rappin' on the windows, have they?" Bull-Fiddle demanded sharply. "They know better'n that. Don't see how we can disturb 'em unless they violate the law."

Tessie thought she was primed. "In Seattle they could be arrested on a vagrancy charge. . ."

"Can't get 'em on that up here," Bull-Fiddle argued. "Each one has a visible means of support."

"Huh!" Tessie snorted. "I suppose you term a box of cigars in a show case and a half dozen bottles of soda pop on a shelf in the front room visible support. The pop's been there so long the bottles are collector's items, and the cigars—huh! Well, you know what happens when some innocent tourist steps into one of the places to buy one."

An audible chuckle rippled lightly over the sourdoughs: It was rare sport of a summer's day, watching the expression on a male tourist's face when he stepped to a counter and belatedly saw through the camouflage. Usually he stuttered, bought a cigar and then lighted it to cover his confusion. This didn't help because the weed flamed like a prairie fire and was hastily cast aside. And when frugal wives insisted the customer return and demand his money back confusion became rout.

"My clients believe," Tessie continued, "that such episodes are a blot on the famed Alaskan hospitality."

"I ain't so sure of it," Bull-Fiddle

answered. "Like as not the men go back home and tell their pardners what happened. And I'll bet the incident suffers none from the tellin'. Chances are it comes under the name of high adventure, men bein' what they are. I'm afraid, Miss Trumbull, a jury of miners wouldn't convict the girls on a vag charge. Protest placed on file. The clerk'll read the next petition."

ANYONE could see that the clerk was fighting mad when he got to his feet.

"This here petition is a insult to one of the finest men the North has ever knowed!" he roared. "It wants Old Man Jessup's log cabin and dogs abated as a nuisance. It wants Old Man Jessup abated, too. It claims he's a fire hazard and a mental case, that he should be tried before a lunacy jury and sent to the insane asylum. And that his dogs howl all night at the moon and disturb the peace."

Jeers filled the room. Bull-Fiddle banged the gavel furiously.

"Shut up, you wallopers!" he bellowed. "I'm just as mad about this as you are, but rough stuff won't help none." He scowled at the reform group. "So you are claimin' Old Man Jessup missed too many boats, eh? That's Alaskan for a man's condition when he's stayed in the country too long and went crazy, in case you don't know."

"My clients feel," Tessie insisted bravely, "that something must be done for the old man's protection. He's ninety years old, practically blind and my clients tell me he has delusions."

"What kind of delusions?" Bull-Fiddle demanded of the reform delegation. "Speak up, one of you, and make yourself clear."

"He's positive he can find some sort of thing—he calls it a mother lode," a woman answered. "He's too feeble to get into the hills, and he couldn't see a mother lode if it were put before his eyes. He has violent spells, too."

"What kind of violent spells?" Bull-Fiddle persisted.

"He insists that some imaginary person named Two-Bit Logan robbed the grub he had spent two years packing into some place he calls the Skookum River country," the woman explained. "And this prevented him from finding the mother lode."

"That happened," Bull-Fiddle explained.

"And he's always sending Outside to travel bureaus for literature on world tours," the woman concluded. "He's practically on charity, yet he talks of touring the world."

"He planned that tour seventy years ago," Bull-Fiddle defended, "but he never could quite make the grade. He ain't given up, though, and it's a sermon a lot of younger people could take to heart. I'm puttin' all this Old Man Jessup nonsense on file."

"Methinks I hear the tumble of the old steamroller," Tessie said. "Well, I'm prepared. I brought this along expecting the very action you have just taken." She handed him a paper.

Bull-Fiddle flushed and cleared his throat. "Steamroller or not, my action's final." He then examined the paper she handed him. "It's a warrant callin' for Old Man Jessup's arrest and trial on the grounds of insanity. I guess this is for you, Hank." He handed the warrant to the United States deputy marshal.

"The hell with 'em," Hank Lucas said wrathfully. "I won't serve it."

The delegation gasped in amazement, then filed out, leaving Terrible Tessie to watch for any eleventh hour skullduggery. The council completed routine business and adjourned.

"I want to see you, Hank," Bull-Fiddle said. "And you, too, Flapjack." He nodded toward a long, thin sourdough, Flapjack Meehan. When the three of them retired to Bull-Fiddle's office he said, "There're no two ways about it, that warrant's got to be served. It's the law. They've hired this Tessie wench to see this thing through. And she'll do it. I'm hopin' for an eleventh hour way out of it all."

"I suppose it'll have to be served," Hank Lucas agreed, "but it's like askin' a man to stick a knife in his own father's back. I remember once on Hunker Creek I was freezin' to death. So was Old Man Jessup, but he drug me in on a sled. Then another time—"

"He mushed seventy-two hours draggin' me on a sled," Bull-Fiddle said. "Got me to Doc Gleason's in time to save my frozen feet. Better man never hit the North than Old Man Jessup, and now we've got to arrest him."

"Then there was the time I was down with diphtheria," Flapjack said. "Old Man Jessup was the only man in camp who'd take care of me." He glared through the window at Terrible Tessie's satisfying figure. "Damn that female lawyer, anyhow."

"It ain't her fault," Bull-Fiddle said. "A lawyer has to take clients as they come. I could tell by the gleam in her eye she didn't think much of 'em." Long, depressing minutes passed, then Bull-Fiddle said, "No use of beatin' round the bush, we've got to break the news to the old man."

"Do you mean we've got to arrest him?" the marshal asked.

"That's about the size of it," Bull-Fiddle admitted. "Them damned busybodies will raise hell and put a block under it if we don't."

OLD MAN JESSUP'S cabin had once been on the outskirts, but the camp had grown towards it. The cabin was a well-chinked, long structure and time had grown a lusty crop of moss on the roof.

Behind the cabin was a frame shed containing sleds, dog harness, prospecting equipment and the fish wheel he set up in the river when the salmon were running. On a ridge, immediately behind the shed, stood the racks on which he dried salmon for dog food. Iron stakes driven into the ground on the sunny side of the cabin held his chained malamutes from fighting each other, or making common cause against passing dogs.

As they neared the cabin, seven doys were howling dismally. The reason was apparent—Old Man Jessup was approaching with a dish of mush and salmon. He dropped the pan in front of the nearest dog, and started back to the cabin. The dog stopped howling and began gulping. The remaining six howled.

Old Man Jessup moved with a shuffling walk, holding one hand against his hip.

"Acts like one leg was shorter'n the other," Flapjack Meehan observed. "The old boy sure is in bad shape."

In a few moments he was out again with a second pan and that left five dogs to howl. The last dog was fed when he heard their footsteps. He jerked around in surprise, squinting and blinking in an effort to identify the visitors. They spoke and he recognized their voices. A sparkle came to the faded blue of his eyes and he limped forward.

"Damn me, if it ain't mighty thoughtful of you boys to come around and call on an old cuss," he said. "Kind makes a man sorta choke up, as the feller says. I know you're all busy lads —Bull-Fiddle with his flyin', Flapjack with his restaurant and Hank with his deputy business. Come right in and set down and I'll fetch you a cup of tea."

The delegation exchanged uneasy glances and followed Jessup into his cabin. He chuckled and talked to himself, after the manner of very old people who have been left alone a lot. "Just about the time I figgered the boys had forgot me, in they pops. It fair warms the cockles of a man's heart."

"He ain't makin' it any easier for us," Flapjack whispered, sitting down on a worn bench.

The others joined him and glanced over the interior of the cabin. The bunk stood in one corner of an adjoining room and consisted of a bear hide stretched tightly between stout timbers. His sleeping bag was on top. A full half of the cabin was piled high with newspapers, boxes split up for kindling, and bags of excelsior he had picked up when shipments were unpacked.

"Fire in the cook stove went out," he said, "but I'll get her goin' in a second."

"Let me do it," Bull-Fiddle offered.

"Thank you, no," Old Man Jessup said. "Any time I can't treat my guests right I won't have 'em." He filled the stove with paper and kindling, then wadded up a piece of newspaper and limped to an oil drum heater in the other room. He thrust the paper against the few remaining embers, and blew hard. When the embers flared, igniting the

paper, he hurried back to the kitchen. Bits of flaming paper detached themselves and settled to the floor. Another settled on his thick, snowy beard, but he casually knocked it off with a gnarled hand. The odor of burning hair blended with the smell of drying woolen clothing.

Bull-Fiddle shook his head. Maybe the reformers had something when they insisted that Old Man Jessup was a fire hazard.

Old Man Jessup put the last of his tea into a blackened pot and continued talking to himself. "Last of the tea and God knows where I'll get any more, but this is a special occasion. Best is none too good for these boys. Practically my own. I remember when they was sprouts—" He broke off abruptly, realizing he was talking aloud and they could hear him.

HE SAT down, facing them—a sturdily built man with short back and stocky, powerful legs. He had thick, slightly sloping shoulders. In early days his feats of packing had been the talk of the Yukon and many a time he had said, "When the Lord made me he used the materials that should've went into a damned good mule."

Bull-Fiddle nudged the marshal, a signal to break the bad news and end a trying situation. The marshal whispered, "Keep your shirt on, Bull-Fiddle. Ain't no hurry about this."

"Suppose you heard about my accident last spring," Old Man Jessup said. "I was makin' grubstake money unloadin' a lumber scow. Got a big timber on my shoulder, but it was too much for my helper. Some of the present crop of youngsters ain't up to snuff, seems like. The load was too much for him and he dropped his end. Damned timber bounced and give my back a bad turn. Doc Gleason said it was the sacred illyack, or somethin'. It kinda made a old man out of me for awhile. Lost a whole season's prospectin' on the Skookum River."

Flapjack Meehan cleared his throat. It was high time somebody broke the news. He determined to do it as gently as possible. "The reason we came," he said heavily, "is because—" Then courage failed him. "Because we got to wonderin' about that back of yours."

"Yeah, that was it," Bull-Fiddle hastily echoed, "we worried about your back."

"I guess I ain't the man I used to be," Old Man Jessup said, losing some of his brightness. "Sometimes I think I never was. It's been a bad year for me. Sorta figgered I'd strike the mother lode sure this summer and take that trip I've been plannin'." He brightened again with a miner's eternal optimism. "But there's always another year, as the feller says. There was something else I didn't like. Worried me like hell, it did. For the first time in my life I ain't gettin' along with my neighbors. They don't like my dogs, for one thing. Claim they make too much noise."

"The hell with 'em," Bull-Fiddle said.

"That's the way I felt about it," Old Man Jessup said, "but I'm a man that's always tried to get along. Give a little and take a little has always been my policy. Then one woman said I should be sent to Mornin'side and locked up. Hell, that's the insane asylum down in the Oregon country. That hurt. I'm just as sane as you are. Or am I?" He tried to search their faces with his failing vision. "Sometimes, of night, I get to wonderin' if I'd missed too many boats."

"Hell no!" the committee roared in unison.

Old Man Jessup felt better. "When it worried me too much I'd say, 'Jessup, don't be a horse's behind and get worried over gossip. If you figger out where that mother lode is it'll keep you busy. I think I've got it figgered out—it's somewheres in the headwaters of Skookum River. If I can hit her next spring right after the break-up, I ought to take out enough money to make that trip around the world. Then I know some old-timers I'd like to grubstake. They won't strike nothin', but it'll keep 'em from goin' to seed."

"Sounds reasonable," Bull-Fiddle agreed. "I was thinkin', though," he continued, gulping down the tea, "that as long as we're here—" The marshal kicked him on the shin.

"What in tarnation has got into you boys?" Old Man Jessup demanded in sudden suspicion, "I got a feelin' there's somethin' goin' on I can't see or hear."

"Not a thing," Bull-Fiddle lied.

"I'm ashamed of myself for my thoughts," Old Man Jessup said. "Might know, if I had a lick of sense, my best friends wouldn't be up to shenanigans."

"What you doin' about this sacred illyack business?" Bull-Fiddle inquired. "They tell me those things heal slowly, and the Skookum River country is tough even when a man is in top shape. Say —why don't you go down to the pioneer home in Sitka for the winter? They'd give you the right kind of doctorin' and care. You'd be with a lot of old friends, and—"

"So I was right?" Old Man Jessup interrupted. "You are up to somethin'. You are double-crossin' me. You're tryin' to railroad me to an old man's home. Bull-Fiddle, I'd see myself in hell before I'd do such a thing to you."

BULL-FIDDLE, Hank and Flapjack mopped their brows and it wasn't the hot tea that made them sweat. The former, out of the goodness of his heart, had taken over the burden of saving an old friend hurt and humiliation and he was getting into deep water. But he had been in deep water many times in his life and emerged without getting a wetting above the chin.

"There you go! There you go, flyin' off'n the handle," he yelled at Old Man Jessup. "Just tryin' to do you a favor and get you in shape for next season's prospectin', and you accuse me of double-crossin' you. By golly, that hurts." He achieved a deep, hurt sigh.

"I'm sorry," Old Man Jessup said. "I wish you'd give me a good sock on the jaw or a boot in the stern. I've got it comin'. But when you get old and can't see too well, and you don't hear everythin' that's bein' said, why you get idears like—like missin' too many boats."

"Sure you do! Sure you do!" Bull-Fiddle agreed. "Here's our plan—we'll send you to Sitka in one of my planes. We'll take care of your cabin and dogs and have 'em in shape for you when the break-up comes next year. When you say the word I'll have a plane pick you up and it won't cost you a dime."

"I ain't lookin' for charity," Old Man Jessup argued.

"I mean it won't cost you a dime right now," Bull Fiddle added lamely. "You can pay me when you strike the mother lode. Now think it over and let us know."

When the trio left Old Man Jessup limped to the door and shook hands with each. "If I try tellin' you boys how I feel, like as not I'd start blubberin'. A winter at the pioneer home might be just about the ticket. Then next spring—"

"Sure! Sure!" Bull-Fiddle agreed hastily. "Next spring you'll be rarin' to go." He smothered his elation, for he knew it was in the bag now.

Nothing was said until the trio was a good four blocks from Old Man Jessup's cabin. "Damned if I don't have to hand it to you, Bull-Fiddle," Flapjack said. "You talked him into it."

"Yes, I think I did," Bull-Fiddle confessed modestly. "Well, there's a big problem off'n my mind. We won't have to worry about him again. He'll meet a lot of old friends at the home. He'll be warm, get three square meals a day and when the storms howl he'll have a dry roof over him. By next spring he'll fit into the life there and he won't want to leave it."

"But what about this female lawyer?" Flapjack asked. "Her clients want him sent to a bughouse."

"I'll drop in on her," Bull-Fiddle promised.

He found Terrible Tessie studying mining law when he entered her office. He related what had happened. "Do you suppose you can talk your clients into forgettin' the whole business, now that Old Man Jessup is goin' to leave the country?"

"I've no doubt of it," she replied. "But you are sure this is permanent? He won't come popping up next spring again?"

"Naw," Bull-Fiddle said confidently. "He'll forget all about the mother lode

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and a trip around the world by spring. At his age men get near-sighted and forgetful. I'm glad everything turned out all right. But listen—can't you find business enough to keep you goin' without havin' truck with them cheechako reformers?"

She flooded him with a warming smile. "I hope to, Mr. Trent. You know where my office is."

"Sure! Sure! Don't think much of women lawyers, but you was mighty delicate in dealin' with Old Man Jessup. And a man can never tell when he'll have to go a-lawin'."

OLD MAN JESSUP was helped aboard one of Bull-Fiddle Trent's smaller planes several days later. The pilot was flying a shipment of furs to Seattle and planned to make stops at Inland Passage ports. For that reason he was using a pontoon job. It was but a hop and skip over the mountains to Sitka.

"I'm not taking a co-pilot this trip," the pilot explained to his passenger, "and you can have his place. Here, let me fix that seat belt. Here's a pair of dark glasses in case the brilliant sunlight hurts your eyes. We've had lots of rain lately and the air's clear." He put a pair of binoculars within reach. He said his name was Rusty Wade.

When they had been in the air fifteen minutes, Old Man Jessup said, "It'll be a mite out of our way, son, and Bull-Fiddle Trent wouldn't like it, but I'm wonderin' if you'd fly over the headwaters of Skookum River. I've prospected the lower Skookum a lot and I figger to prospect the upper country next summer."

"Sure," the pilot answered, "but—I understand you can't see very well."

"Can't." Old Man Jessup answered. "That is, close up. I'm far-sighted and you'd be surprised what I can see a long way off."

Rusty Wade changed his course and presently deep gulches and snowy ridges slid smoothly under the pontoons. "Why do you persist in thinking the Skookum River has gold? Miners tell me they don't even find *color* in the gravel."

"I've give that a hell of a lot of thought, as the feller says," Old Man Jessup replied. "I'm kinda keepin' the answer to myself. If I was your age, and could make good time on the ground, I'd pan the Skookum plumb to its source. Chances are you'd find the mother lode."

"What'd it be like?" The pilot was interested in spite of himself, though Old Man Jessup and his phantom mother lode were a standing joke.

"It'll probably be a high-grade ledge in some mountain," the old man explained. "For millions of years, mebbe, erosion has been breakin' away the rock, leaving gold. Gold breaks off and is washed downstream, or mebbe carried along by glaciers and dumped. Say, would you mind turnin' up this canyon? It's the south fork, as I figger it?"

"Sure!" He turned up the canyon, flying as low as common sense permitted in a broken-up land with tricky downdrafts. The plane heaved and bucked and Rusty Wade wondered if Old Man Jessup would get air sick. But he didn't. He merely squinted at the canyon walls, gave a longer look at the hanging glaciers flashing blue and green in the hard sunlight, then asked, "Could we go back down the north fork?"

"Okay!"

The north fork was a frothing stream, but already rocks in the deeper canyons were glazing over with ice. Wings almost scraped canyon walls, but the pilot wasn't worried—there was plenty of room ahead and the country dropped off abruptly. He guessed some of the waterfalls were a couple of hundred feet high.

Old Man Jessup's attitude was calm and contemplative. He had evidently concluded that the pilot knew his business and the plane was in no danger. His interest was centered on spiny ridges breaking abruptly at the canyon. Once he pointed. "Don't spose a plane could land on that lake. It ain't bigger'n a pocket handkerchief."

"Bigger'n you think," Rusty answered. "Landing would be easy enough, though it would take a bit of doing to fly out. But it could be done. We call it Mirror Lake. It shows all the mountains and glaciers, as well as the sky. Not a very original name."

They left the north fork and Mirror Lake behind and several hours later Rusty set the plane down at Sitka. He helped Old Man Jessup to a float and while the plane was being serviced, started for the home.

Old Man Jessup's feet lagged as he neared the buildings. He squinted at the old-timers sitting on nearby benches, and he blinked at the old Russian cannon. Just when it seemed no one knew him a voice yelled, "Pat Jessup. You damned old tomcat. Still cheatin' the undertaker, I see."

"Sport McCord!" Old Man Jessup howled. "Can't see your face, but I know your voice. My eyes ain't as good as your'n."

"They never was," Sport McCord retorted. "I always could see a squaw in a blueberry patch five or ten minutes before you spotted her."

"Heh! Heh! Heh!" Old Man Jessup chuckled and pounded Sport's shoulder. "But you didn't always get there first."

"I'm glad you're comin' here to live. All a man has to do is eat three meals a day, sleep all night, and watch the tourist gals that come in on the steamers. Them gals! Sometimes I think I was borned fifty years too soon. Then again—"

Heh! Heh! Heh! Damned tootin'—*then again.* You had your moments, you old curly wolf. But say, I ain't here for good. Just here to get in shape for summer prospectin'. Aim to hit the mother lode, then spend a year goin' 'round the world and seein' folks in furrin' places."

Fifteen minutes later Rusty Wade left Old Man Jessup surrounded by a score of old friends who were breaking their necks to welcome him.

"He's a problem," Rusty told the superintendent. "A fire hazard and a nuisance the *cheechakos* want abated. Keep him here, if you can."

"It's as simple as shooting fish in a barrel," the superintendent answered. "You won't be able to break him loose from here with a charge of powder next spring."

BULL-FIDDLE TRENT received a letter from Old Man Jessup in January stating they certainly treated a man right at the home. "It's workin'," he told Flapjack Meehan. "He likes the place. Never even mentioned the mother lode or a world tour in the letter." Bull-Fiddle's elation continued until late spring, then the operator on duty at his short-wave transmission and receiving station called him.

"It's Old Man Jessup," he warned.

The old man's voice was almost a chirp when he responded to Bull-Fiddle's dubious, hello. "Bull-Fiddle, they's a million robins here. A Chinook is meltin' the snow on the mountains, so it must be about time for the break-up in your country."

"About time," Bull-Fiddle admitted.

"Well, how about it?" Old Man Jessup hinted. "Ain't forgettin' you promised to fly me back, are you?"

"Nope. How you feelin'?"

"First rate. Last winter they put me on a table, twisted hell out of my legs and fixed that sacred illyack business," Old Man Jessup explained. "I took things easy at first, but I'm in shape now. I dug a couple of cesspools to sorta limber up my shoulder, then I got a job helpin' plank a street. After that I tried to get a longshorin' job, but didn't have no union card and they wouldn't take me. Since then I've been cuttin' cord wood."

"I think you're a blasted fool to leave such swell surroundin's," Bull-Fiddle growled, "but I'll send a plane for you."

"Listen." Old Man Jessup's voice grew confidential. "I'll cut you in on a good thing. A fourth interest in the mother lode, providin' you'll give me a couple of months' grub and land me and the grub on Mirror Lake."

"All right," Bull-Fiddle agreed, in a defeated voice. "But say—" He winked at his operator—"A grubstaker usually gets half."

"Not when it's a sure thing," Old Man Jessup argued. "And I'm savin' the other three-quarters for my trip around the world and some things I got in mind. Good-by, son."

"Good-by—you damned kid!"

When conditions were right he sent Rusty Wade to pick up Old Man Jessup. Rusty found marked improvement physically, but a winter in the home hadn't helped his vision. He identified friends by squinting and listening to the voice.

They hopped over to Juneau, bought an outfit, loaded it into the plane and hopped off the following morning. The ice was broken up on Mirror Lake and landing a heavily loaded plane took a bit of doing, but Rusty managed it. He paddled the plane to a thick mass jutting out from the shore and helped Old Man Jessup on it. Then he unloaded the outfit and started to pack it ashore.

"Don't bother," Old Man Jessup said. "I can make it in good shape."

"I know you can," Rusty answered, "but I need the exercise." It was a noble lie. He was afraid the old gentleman would tumble into a lurking crackbefore he saw it."

With Rusty leading the way they carried everything to an open spot ashore and put up the tent."I guess that's about all I can do for you. Hang a green limb on the tent when you want me to pick you up," he said.

"I'll do it," Old Man Jessup said. "And listen, son," he added, "this ain't no work of love you're doin' for me. I won't have it that way. You might figger to take a trip somewheres next winter. Maybe to Palm Beach or somewheres. All expenses paid out of the mother lode."

"That'll be swell," Rusty agreed.

OLD MAN JESSUP watched him take off and make a hair-raising climb out of the pocket. "By golly, some of the time he was mostly a blur, but from what I could see that boy has a trip around the world comin' to him." He listened a moment to the roar of the North Fork of the Skookum River and a wistful smile played around his lips. "Suppose I should go to bed, but damned if I ain't goin' down and pan a little dirt. A little color in the pan would do me more good'n a drink of whiskey."

Shadows were falling when he began his panning, and he had to almost put

(Continued on page 110)

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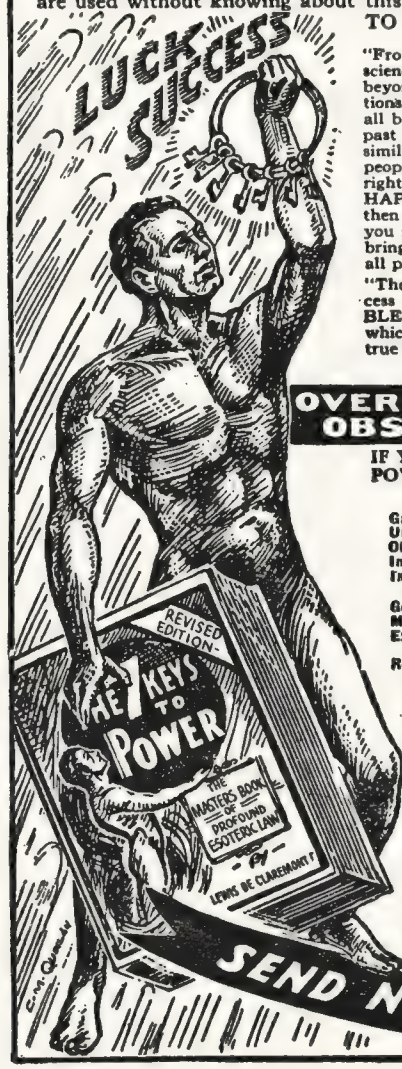

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(Continued from page 108)

his nose into the pan to see the result. But there it was—not flakes of gold, but a two-bit nugget. He chuckled, there in the gathering shadows, then climbed slowly the steep bank to the lake.

"Knowed it was there all the time," he said happily. "It had to be. Why didn't color get downstream? Well, chances are there's a natural dike that's blocked the gold from workin' downstream. Ought to be quite a chunk of money piled up behind that dike. I'll stake that for some of the boys down in the home, give 'em one more thrill before they cash in their checks. Damn me if I don't deck Sport McCord out in a new suit of clothes, give him a couple of thousand dollars and let him chase his last widder-woman."

He was still talking happily of the future when he crawled into his bag and tried to sleep. He kept turning back and forth and staring at the tent walls.

"Go to sleep, you old fool," he presently roared, "you're fidgetin' 'round like a bride. You gotta lotta work to do."

He was up early the following morning, gulped down breakfast and made his way to the stream. He worked slowly along, panning bars and getting nuggets and flake gold, with every pan. Abruptly three weeks later, Old Man Jessup found himself panning *hungry* ground. He nodded his head sagely and moved back downstream to the last bar yielding color. He packed grub to this point and made a temporary camp, then he began climbing the bench. Day after day he shifted back and forth. When he found gold he drove a stake in the spot. When he drifted into hungry ground he knew he was off the trail.

Slowly, patiently, he worked his way upward into a gulch that was littered with *picture rock*—ore studded with gold.

"She's up there," Old Man Jessup said. "It'll take me three, four days to stake this here claim. It's bad country and I can't afford to slip, fall and get my blasted illyack out again."

The country was tougher than he thought and a week passed before he staked the ground; then he used up

another week knocking off ore samples. He packed the last of them to his tent, then cut a fresh green bough and hung it against the white canvas. This done, he sat down and lighted his pipe.

"Kinda feel all let down," he said. "Now I've found the mother lode I don't know what to do. Goin' 'round the world will be fun, but after that what? Guess I feel like that cuss who conquered the world, then wept. Well, I ain't goin' to shed no tears." He chuckled. "Figger to laugh instead. Everybody'll wonder how a half blind old coot like me found the mother lode."

PLANES didn't pass over the country regularly and it was ten days before Rusty Wade saw the green bough on the tent. He set her down on the lake and yelled, "How're things?"

"Fair to middlin'," Old Man Jessup answered. He handed Rusty a little sack and the pilot almost dropped it.

"Gold!" he yelped.

"What'd you think it was—feathers?" Old Man Jessup asked. "Hundred ounces in there. Panned it while waitin' for you to show up."

In a daze Rusty Wade loaded the old man's samples aboard the plane. He nearly lost a pontoon on an outcropping in getting out, but once clear he sped for Cold Deck at full throttle.

Bull-Fiddle Trent, Doc Gleason, Terrible Tessie, Flapjack and several Cheechakos were on hand when Old Man Jessup stepped from the plane.

"He found the mother lode," Rusty Wade shouted. "Ore that'll run as high as twenty-five thousand dollars a ton. Plenty that'll run from five hundred to a thousand dollars. There'll be the damndest stampede you ever heard of."

"Great!" Bull-Fiddle exclaimed inadequately. "I suppose you'll want to record your claims, first thing, Jessup. "Tell us how you happened to hit the mother lode right on the nose."

"When you offered to fly me home I was goin' to say no," Old Man Jessup told them. "I felt them *cheechakos*—I mean my new sourdough friends—they've wintered in and that makes 'em sourdoughs. I felt they might think they'd chased me out of the country. Then I asks myself, 'Why not get 'em to fly you down the Skookum River, spot the lode from the air and save your legs?'"

"I wondered why you left so meekly, you old fox," Bull-Fiddle said. "I might have known."

"When we flew down the north fork, me bein' far-sighted, I spotted rusty places on the side of the mountain. Rust means iron, and iron's the mother of gold. And when I saw signs of silica with it, I knowed I'd found it."

"What're your plans?" Bull-Fiddle asked.

A man kinda likes to go home after he's been away," Old Man Jessup answered.

Old Man Jessup sent a couple of native boys for his dogs and they arrived soon after he did. He built a fire, narrowly escaping setting the cabin and himself on fire as he did so; then he rummaged around and found dried salmon for the dogs. He fed them and wished they'd howl—for several reasons.

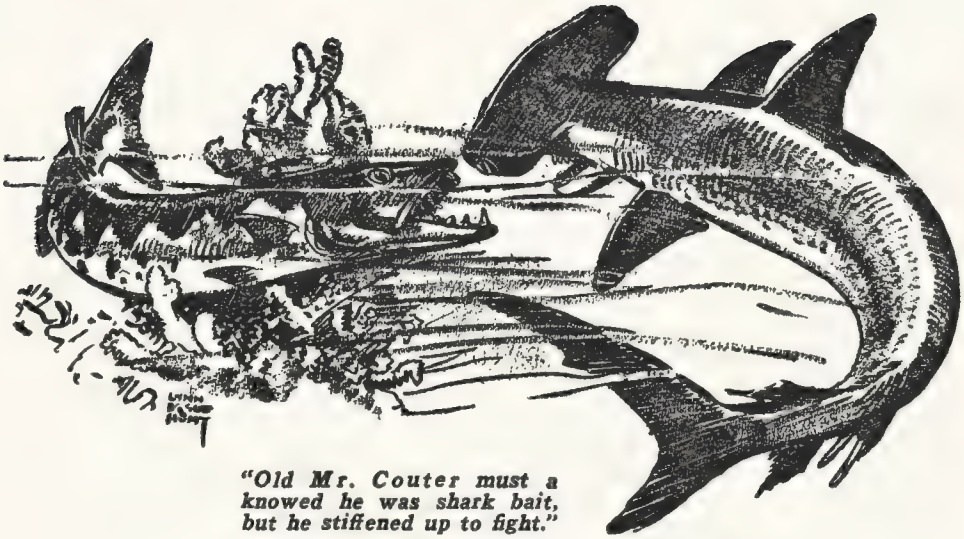
They didn't howl, so he unearthed a harmonica from a drawer and started a tune. That got action. The dogs gave all they had. A half hour later Old Man Jessup heard the tramp of many feet. "Sounds like they're comin' to abate me," he cheerfully reflected.

After considerable blinking Old Man Jessup recognized Terrible Tessie and her clients. They were carrying a hastily made sign which read:

WELCOME HOME DAD JESSUP

They regarded him as Dad, did they? He liked it. Terrible Tessie made a speech in which she said her clients realized they were wrong in trying to have him sent away. Things didn't seem natural during his absence. Then she presented him with five more dogs, gifts from her clients. Somebody yelled, Speech!"

"I'm goin' to watch you boys stampede," he answered, "then I'm buyin' myself a ticket for a trip around the world. When that's done I'll come back here and keep busy. A man can't afford to let hisself get rusty."



"Old Mr. Couter must a knowed he was shark bait, but he stiffened up to fight."

BARRACUDA

By Peggy von der Goltz

"A BARRACUDA," Cap'n Charlie said, "is the orneriest thing afloat. Born mean, bone mean, and everlastin' cussed—that's a barracuda.

"I knowed an old couter once—fifty pounds he must-a weighed, six foot of bone and muscle and killin' teeth; streakedy green and white like sunglint through manatee grass, and so unnoticeable that a school of fish would swim right past him so's he could eat his fill and herd up enough for a big supper.

"A barracuda is the only fish ever I heerd tell of with sense enough to eat what he could and save a snack for the morrow. But a couter'll do it, ever' chance he gits. That's how first I come to know the old couter that give me so much trouble. I was out seinin' for mullet; they was comin' in on the flood tide, a-splashin' and a-rumblin' like thunder. Thousands of mullet, millions, I reckon, comin' in to spawn along the shoals. They spread out like a carpet on the water, a solid, shinin' carpet of mullet in their blue sea coats. Gulls and pelicans swoopin' over the school. Porpoises leapin' and feastin'. Sharks was turning under them. Other boats was out.

"We filled our nets and drug again. But all of a sudden the run was cut off around us, cut as clean as if 'twas a pair of shears that done it. This patch of school holds together, a-jumpin' and a-tumblin', headin' straight for a little sand bottomed bayou. I knowed the's but one critter afloat in the Gulf with wit enough to do that, and it riled me.

" 'Think you're so smart, old Mr. Couter,' I says, 'stealin' my school. I'll take it back from you,' I says. So I up anchor and ease over to the bayou.

"There's the mullet, huddled together, scairt and meek. And acrost the mouth of the bayou a big couter's struttin', lazy-like and proud and unconcerned. Whichever way he turns, the mullet turns, eyein' him and apein' him and knowin' certain sure they're goners. Kind a pitiful, they seemed though that might a been because old Mr. Couter had 'em instid of me.

"I went on and dumped my catch in the weir and then come back. Old Mr. Couter was still there, and so was the mullet. The tide's turned and they wanted to go out to sea, but he wasn't leav-

in' 'em go. He was savin' them mullet till he got good and hongry, like any farmer fattenin' a pen of shoats.

"I set the boy ashore and give him one end of the seine. Then I run the boat acrost to th' other side of the bayou, spreadin' it as I went. I figgered that old couter'd see me and dart out ahead of the boat; and I'd have the mullet. But he was so sot on his job he didn't pay no mind till the boat was most across; then he shot straight for the Gulf, rippin' through the seine like a bullet through a lace curtain.

"I heaved the boat hook at him, but somehow I over-reached myself and fell smack in the water. Old Mr. Couter tears back. He slams into me full steam ahead. Me and the couter and the seine go churnin' and flailin'. I see the water turning pink around me—I don't feel pained, jest see the water pinkin' and know I'm couter meat and shark bait less'n I can git aboard ag'in. I scramble into the stern and drap, plumb tuckered. I taken a look at my leg then, and the calf of it was gone, bit off. I ain't walked straight since, and never will ag'in.

"I tie up the bleedin'—it pains a plenty then—and holler for the boy to fetch his end of the seine around so's we can git up what's left of the mullet and the seine. The' wasn't enough mullet for shucks.

"Well, sir, we git back to the weir, and who's traipsin' behind us but old Mr. Couter. He watches the boy throwin' fish into the weir, and he sashays up to the laced-together board and sapling fence that makes the weir. He peeps through a crack and he settles down.

"All the time I'm laid up, I set on the porch and nurse my leg and hate that couter. That consarned couter's homesteadin' outside my weir. He'd mosey along, snubbing his nose on the palings like a boy strummin' a stick on a picket fence. Ever' little while he'd butt the fence and a sapling'd spring and a fish'd slip out, and he'd snap up the fish, lookin' as proud as Punch with hisself. All that time I had to set and ease my leg and pay the hire of a man to catch fish for a barracuda. You wonder I hated his back teeth?

"First day I could hobble, I taken a harpoon down to the weir to git rid of that couter. But I reckon I was peaked from settin' so long—anyhow, he jest slid from under the harpoon and flipped his tail at me. Three, four days passed by with me a-throwin' that harpoon and old Mr. Couter a-flippin' his tail at me.

"Then I taken the boy's .22 to old Mr. Couter; but, shuh, the bullets didn't seem to have no more force than spitballs.

"I borreyed a shotgun, tried it out a couple a times to git the pattern. I moseyed down to the weir. Old Mr. Couter was layin' on top of the water, lazy as an old bull 'gator, and I let him have it.

"He shaken hisself like a skeeter'd stung him, and went around to th' other side.

"I kept at him all day, and by sundown I was wore out complete. I hated that couter like the old Nick hisself, and, hatin' him so, I knowed th' was nothing for it—I had to outsmart him. So I got out my tarpon rod and cleaned it, greased the reel and run a brand new line onto it. I used a piano wire leader and the finest hook money could buy.

"Bright and early in the mornin', I hooked on a nice gray snapper and cast off from the shore. Mr. Couter eyed the gray snapper; then he slewed around and butted the weir. A red mullet squinched out and he ate it, much as to tell me gray snapper was cheap as chittlin's and he only eat the best.

"I tried him on red mullet then, on sheddar crab and red snapper and even little couters. I tried him on side meat and bacon and worms. I knowed what he wanted, but I jest naturally hated to pamper that triflin' fish; in the end, though, I went out and spent the day, the en-tire day, catchin' squid to hook old Mr. Couter.

"This time I was foxy. I taken the rowboat and went up-river a ways and come down slow, trollin' the squid. Old Mr. Couter spies the squid. He sort of drifts around, scarce a fin twitchin', eyein' the squid, suspicionin' it, wonderin' maybe why th' ain't a school of squid.

"I slip a loose squid over the side; it tucks up its legs, wraps its tail around

itself, and shoots off. Snap! he's got it. He swalleys it and looks at the baited squid. He slides over and studies it. He takes it, slow and easy, mouths it, turns it the way a couter will so's to make sure it's headfirst—then he swalleys it, squid, hook, and a foot of leader.

"HE PULLS back, gags, then rip, slash, leap, dive, and twist! He makes for the open Gulf, the line singin' behind him.

"He jumps so high he trails a rainbow. He runs under the boat and tries to break the line, near upsettin' the boat. He backs and pulls and shakes like a bulldog. He races off, pullin' the boat like it was a playpretty.

"He zigzags up along the coast, leapin' and divin' and wrasslin'. I begin to wonder if ever I will get shut of that fish. Then I see we're amongst the coral heads, and he's swirlin' in and out, tryin' to cut the line. I don't favor the i-deah of comin' all this ways to have my boat stove in on a coral rock. All of a sudden he leaves go and lays like a log on the water, played out.

"I pull him in close. I pick up an oar. 'Now,' I says, 'you flea-bitten, fish stealin', man eatin' varmint, I'm goin' to knock your head off,' I says. I heft the oar to strike, when, shoot! he's off. He slews round a coral head and, snap, the line goes.

"I jest set there, past cussin'. Then I see he was snagged on the coral, only a little under water. The leader'd cut into the coral and the swivel was fast in the rock.

"I set still till he quieted. I hefted the oar to crack down on his head, thinkin' how good it'd be to go home in peace. But killin' was too good for that fish. I'll leave him there, I think, snagged to the coral head, till he starves to death. Serve him right to lay there, watchin' fishes swimmin' by and wantin' 'em and starvin' slow.

"It was black dark when I got home, but I was oneasy, so I swung the flashlight around outside the weir to see if he could'a got loose and folleyed me. He hadn't.

"He wasn't there in the mornin', nor yet in the evenin'. I looked for him ever' day for a right smart while. I kept on a tellin' myself I was rid of him. 'The gulls have pecked his eyes out,' I says. 'The sharks have et him. Or else by now he's dead of starvin' and the mullet's suckin' his bones.' But I couldn't forgit him. I'd wake of a night, thinkin' I heerd him splash by the weir. Else I'd wake with my leg painin', dreamin' he had me ag'in. Couple of weeks passed by, and still I dreamt of him. I'd never rest easy until that fish was dead.

"I said I was goin' out for bonita, and I wet a line so's not to make a story of myself. But 'twasn't long until I was moseyin' over the coral rocks, watchin' down through the water, blue-green like a sody-pop bottle but so clear I could make out the orange mouths on a school of little grunt that was weavin' in and out amongst sea fans, catchin' shrimp.

"I cut the motor and let her drift whilst I watched for old Mr. Couter. And then I spied him, still snagged on the coral head. And a sorry sight to see. Gaunted until he was all head. His stripes was faded to a dirty gray instid of green and silver-shine. He was rockin' with the tide, too feeble to switch his fins. He'd roll belly up and then roll back. Only his eyes was alive.

"His eyes was watchin' that school of grunt dancin' around after shrimp; and all my life long, when I think of starvin' I'll remember that barracuda, hooked by the mouth to a coral head, seein' a dozen dinners play jest out of reach whilst he died of hunger.

" 'Serves you right,' I says, and seemed like he looked at me and hated me. He stiffened up like he was goin' to sass me, but he swung the other way. I look where he does, and see a fin cuttin' water. Shark!

"The shark's a big hammerhead, shaped like a tackhammer with an eye on either end and a terrible mouth between. He circled old Mr. Couter, eyein' him and studyin' him to see why he was layin' still. Old Mr. Couter makes an almighty try to turn with the shark, spreadin' his fins and heavin' his tail, fannin' that last spark of life to make a fightin' fire of it.

"The shark slid down, turned under

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Mr. Couter, readyin' to strike. Old Mr. Couter must a knowed he was shark bait, but he stiffened up to fight. That's why I done it, I reckon, because he wouldn't give up—I taken the gaff and reached down and jerked the leader loose from the coral.

"The shark eased off when he seen the gaff—sharks is yellow. Old Mr. Couter sagged with the jerk on the leader, he was that tuckered. Then he shaken hisself like he knowed he was free but couldn't believe it. He sunk in the water till he was level with the shark—and, starved as he was, he lit into that shark!

"The shark turned slow and clumsy, but Couter missed by a foot. He quivered and comes back. The hammerhead tilted, rolled over, and bit Couter's tail, rippin' right into the body.

"Couter swung loose, the whole starved six foot of him a shakin'. He could a hid in the coral and maybe lived, but he didn't.

"He heaved what's left of his tail. His jaws gaped, come down on the shark's head, on one evil, out-stickin' eye.

"The shark begun to circle, thrashin', divin', buttin' into coral rock, leavin' a trail of blood behind. Couter's scraped ag'inst the coral, gouged from head to tail, battered and bleedin'. He give a mighty wrench and come loose, rippin' off the hammerhead's eye—the eye and most of the stalk that held it.

"The shark's thrashin' like crazy, thrashin' and gushin' blood. Couter jumps and gits him by the belly. He gits the shark and he hangs on.

"The shark whirls like a devil's merry-go-round. Blind on one side and bit in the belly, that shark goes ber-serk complete. Round and round, off and back ag'in, jumpin' and scrapin' and churnin'.

"The shark wobbles towards me, blunderin' into coral, sickenin', dyin'. The water's red as sunset glow. Old Mr. Couter still hangs on. Maybe he don't feel it. Maybe he's dead. But he don't let go.

"The shark sinks through the roiled water, tumblin' slow. Old Mr. Couter still hangs on—game to the death and eternal ornery, that's a barracuda."

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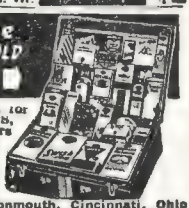

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THE TRAIL AHEAD

Implacable, devious Africa watched and waited to strike, while a young Scotch trader with a Presbyterian conscience came to work at the most crooked, dangerous game in the world. The death drums beat, and white men die, and the jungle learns that nothing is more fearsome than the wrath of a peaceful man, in Gordon MacCreagh's novelette, "The Tenderfoot of Nairobi."

In the same issue—

"Discipline, Navy Style," by Eustace Adams, a story of an old line skipper's fight to hold his command against the "New Navy"; "Orejana," by Eugene Stebbings, the story of a wild range bull's challenge to the pitiless law of the herd; "For Valuable Consideration," a story of the forest air patrol, by Louis C. Goldsmith—

These, plus another instalment of Frank Gruber's "Outlaw," short fiction pieces by James P. Olsen, L. W. Claflin, and departments headed by *Ask Adventure's* famed experts, are in the December issue of

Adventure 15c

On sale at all stands November 8th

THE CAMP-FIRE

Where readers, writers and adventurers meet

ALEC HUDSON, who writes the torpedo yarn in this issue, commanded submarines in the U. S. Navy. It seems a long-distance jump from piloting a ship underseas to teaching school, but he jumped it.

"I was born April 4, 1900, in Stockport, New York, and graduated from the Hudson (N.Y.) High School in 1919. In 1922 I graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and was commissioned an ensign. My first duty was in the U.S.S. Nevada. In 1928 I went to the U.S.S. O-11 at Panama. I graduated from the Submarine School at New London, Conn., in 1924 and went to the U.S.S. S-32 (Manila and China) as engineer officer. In 1927 I returned to Annapolis for post graduate work in diesel engines and storage batteries. In 1929 I received a master of science degree in engineering from Columbia University.

"After finishing my post graduate work at Columbia I went to the U.S.S. Barracuda as engineering officer. In 1932 I came to the Naval Research Laboratory at Washington, D. C. While there I completed the War College correspondence course in Strategy and Tactics and in 1934 wrote the U.S. Naval Institute's prize essay—*Foundation of Naval Policy*.

"Also while I was in Washington the doctors discovered that I was suffering from arthritis of the spine and I narrowly averted retirement. In 1934 I took command of the U.S.S. S-30 at Pearl Harbor, T.H. but in 1936 I was retired as a lieutenant for physical disability.

"After retirement I found employment at the University of Hawaii, teaching mathematics and engineering. I am still working there as assistant professor of engineering.

"I have been married since June, 1922, and have a son. My sudden dive into a literary career has been as much a surprise to me as to any one else."

WE HAVE a special request from four World War veterans, to settle an argument. Does anyone know what became of Hard Boiled Smith? He's the officer who earned this name in charge of American military prisoners in Paris. His full name was Frank Hutches Smith. It's claimed he was living in Painesville, Ohio, in 1921, that he was killed in a

brawl on the Mexican border in 1920, that he was in the newspapers about four years ago in connection with something or other, and is very much alive. None of these gentlemen is seeking contact with Hard Boiled Smith—in other words, on his trail. But having settled many other matters of the World War in frequent discussions, they've gotten into a fine wrangle on this one, the opposing trenches are dug, and some bets are down. Who can help?

TALBOT MUNDY died in his home at Bradenton Beach, Florida, on August 5, 1940, at the age of sixty-one. There was no illness, and his friends had no warning. Mundy was a great raconteur, who had more stories to tell and told them better than any man we've known. Such yarns as the time in the Boer War when, bearing dispatches, he jumped his horse over a hedge and landed in a general's picnic lunch. He had wit, and drama, and made the right pauses, and talked almost better than he wrote. He spent his last evening talking to friends, turned in as usual, and in the morning his wife found him dead in bed.

When we saw him last, his heart was set on one great plan. He was going to ship a trailer, and a car, to India, and roam the Great Highway, that Kipling's *Kim* travelled. Perhaps he would never come back—there was so much to see, and learn. He unrolled all the rich colors and sights and sounds of that highway—paraded India right in front of you. Mundy could cast a spell when he talked of things like this. He knew exactly how that trailer must be made and equipped, and had designed it on paper.

It was his second design in our memory. For years he wanted to sail his own ship around the world. At Tarpon Springs, Florida, he admired the qualities of the double-ended Greek sponge boats, and his own ship grew in his mind. He designed it with the greatest care, and then put naval architects to drawing the specifications. He knew every bolt in that ship he'd build and he never lost his enthusiasm, but as time intervened the dream changed to the trailer in India.

There was another factor—Mundy's great interest in Tibet, which could not be reached by a boat. The occult held a large share of his mind for many years. His last book "Old Ugly-Face" was built around a Tibetan lama. He was fascinated by the Yellow-Hats. The end of that trailer trip was doubtless to be Talbot Mundy and the Grand Lama conversing about the secrets of immortality no white man had ever learned.

If this gives an over-serious or solemn impression, the impression is wrong—Mundy had a hearty booming laugh. Most of his yarns were humorous.

Although Talbot Chetwynd Mundy talked freely of his experiences, and there are many stories about him, he seems to have written very little account of himself. Appearing first in *Adventure* in 1911, and soon thereafter in nearly every issue under the name of Mundy or Walter Galt for some years, he is the one exception to the custom of each author introducing himself by an account of his life. Ransacking all the old volumes gives no clue. In *Who's Who*, he gave the list of his books and only the information that he was born in London in 1879, educated at Rugby, colonial service in India and East Africa 1900 to 1909, came to the United States in 1911.

Talbot Mundy's first appearance in *Adventure* was in April, 1911, with an article called, "Pig-Sticking in India." He headed it with this verse, which represented his own outlook on life extremely well:

Youth's daring spirit, manhood's fire.
Firm hand and eagle eye,

Must he acquire who would
aspire
To see the gray boar die.

Talbot Mundy's fourth story was "The Soul of a Regiment."

Among the most famous yarns of hundreds are "King, of the Khyber Rifles," the *Jimgrim* stories, "Ring Ho!" "Winds of the World," "Om," "Hira Singh," the *Tros of Samothrace* stories of a few years ago, "The Devil's Guard," "Cock of the North," etc. . . .

Mundy left school at 16, went to Germany, drove a wagon in a traveling circus. He wrote an article about this, and it was printed in England. At 18 he went to India to send dispatches to a London paper about tribal fighting. When this petered out, he worked on contracting jobs, bossing native labor. He went to Australia as a seaman. On to Portuguese East Africa, and a river called the Limpopo—("most lawless place in the World, only a ten pound fine for killing a white man and a quid for killing a black"). He went into British East Africa and organized natives into elephant hunts for ivory. Officials considered this poaching. A company of native warriors was sent out to arrest him. Mundy met them with his tribesmen. There was a fine battle and Talbot got a spear in his thigh. He might have died, he said, but he heard the natives were already digging a grave for him. He went to look and was furious at the dimensions of the grave. They were planning to bury him doubled up!

Later he patched up a peace with the officials and got a job in the Colonial Service.

Shortly after he arrived in this country, Mundy was "jumped" one night by two thugs, blackjacked, and robbed of all his money. Having no job and not knowing where to get more money, he said, he wrote a piece about pig-sticking and took it to *Adventure*.

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5.25-17	2.90	1.35
28x5.25-18	2.90	1.35
29x5.25-19	2.95	1.35
30x5.25-20	2.95	1.35
31x5.25-21	3.25	1.35
5.50-17	3.25	1.40
29x5.50-18	3.35	1.40
29x5.50-19	3.35	1.45
6.00-17	3.40	1.40
30x6.00-18	3.40	1.40
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LURTON BLASSINGAME, literary agent, received a letter from brother Wyatt, author and neighbor of Talbot Mundy, written the day Munday died.

Last night the Mundys came over. We sat and talked and had a beer until midnight when they went home.

He had left here laughing and talking. They went home, Dawn (Mrs. Mundy) said, and lay in bed talking and he said he was going to sleep. When she woke up this morning she turned on the radio, said, "Here's the news, Talbot." And he was dead—had evidently died soon after going to sleep, the doctor said.

I had got to know him quite well this year. And he was a man I am very proud to have known. He was well along in his sixties, and yet he was completely without age. I could argue with him exactly as I could with someone my own age. He was extremely vigorous physically. He had spent a lot of time in India and Tibet and he was a firm believer in transmigration. If he awoke before he died, and knew he was going to die, then he wasn't afraid—he was excited about this something new that was going to happen to him. I'd be willing to bet on it.

I'd come to have a great admiration for him.

Mundy was, like most Englishmen I have known, a great hand at limericks. He loved a good bawdy story, and he told them well. He could drink liquor all night, if the conversation was good and he was interested, and the liquor would never touch him; and he could get drunk without a drink on talking about things he believed vital and important.

THIS issue is *Adventure's* thirtieth anniversary. Writers and editors have come and gone—the magazine goes on. Its name *Adventure* represents something that doesn't grow old. The present staff gives the magazine this wish—that its next thirty years bring it, here and there, stories that can stand alongside "The Soul of a Regiment" and other fine yarns of the first thirty years.

H.B.

Ask Adventure

Information you can't get elsewhere

THE critical split seconds of a parachute jump.

Request:—I'd like to know, up to what count a parachute jumper counts, before pulling the rip cord, after he has left the plane.

We looked for information in encyclopedias, and aviation magazines.

Some of them said, two or three seconds after leaving the plane the aviator pulls the rip cord, others say nine or ten seconds.

If it's only three seconds, kindly tell me how they arrived at that rule.

—Bernard Paradis,
Frenchville, Me.

Reply by Major Falk Harmel:—No definite rule has been established with reference to this angle of parachute jumping. The very brief interval of time between the jump from the plane and the pulling of the rip cord is subject to circumstances attending each jump. The most important consideration is that of avoiding the possibility of the parachute, after the rip cord is pulled, becoming entangled in the airplane, thus imperiling the jumper's life. There have been several instances when, confronted with the necessity of making an emergency jump from a disabled airplane, the jumper pulled the rip cord too soon, thus permitting the parachute when it billowed out to become entangled in some part of the plane, with the result that the jumper was dragged down with the plane to his death.

A parachute jumper in the emergency of an enforced jump must, above all, keep his wits about him, and delay pulling the rip cord until he is reasonably certain that the shroud lines of the 'chute will not foul the airplane. Furthermore, the matter of the time interval between the jump and the pulling of the rip cord is governed by the altitude at which the jump is made. If the jump is made from a high altitude, the jumper can afford to delay a few seconds before yanking the rip cord. On the other hand, if the jump happens to be made from a low altitude, the jumper has only split seconds to reckon with and must pull the rip cord quickly and take a gamble on the possibility of the chute becoming entangled with the plane.

So you see, each jump is a law unto itself, and no set time interval can be set for the yanking of the rip cord. Possibly the only exception to this rule may be cited in the case of exhibition parachute jumping, wherein the airplane pilot invariably takes the airplane to a predetermined altitude and brings his airplane to a certain altitude of flight to enable the exhibition jumper to make a safe and easy exit from the airplane; the pilot then making himself scarce in order to give the jumper plenty of room to open his parachute.

In enforced parachute jumps, however, the plane may be in a steep dive, in a spin or in one of various attitudes which make it difficult for the jumper to make his exit. He must get out of the place without loss of time, and if he keeps his head and delays pulling the rip cord until the plane is past him his chance of making a safe landing is practically assured. Some parachute jumpers, too panicky when confronted with the

necessity of leaving the airplane, have pulled the rip cord immediately after the jump and have gotten away with it.

IT TAKES a fox to trap a fox.

Request:—Next trapping season I am going to try to earn my living by trapping. I have had a bit of experience for I have done a lot of trapping in my spare time. I can get most of the animals around here easily enough, but I seem to have trouble with fox. I can't trap them very often.

Will catnip attract gray fox?

Will scents from gray fox, attract the red?

What could I put in scent to make it freeze proof? Is glycerine any good to sprinkle over a set to keep it from freezing?

The following might help you answer my questions. We do mostly bare ground trapping until about Christmas and then snow trapping. The red fox are found chiefly in the mountains in low brush and small trees. There are not many springs where a trapper could make water sets.

Snares become legal all over the state this year, so I'd appreciate information on that, too.

—M. Susko, Dunlo, Pa.

Reply by Mr. Raymond S. Spears:—Trapping a year-round living in six or eight weeks of prime fur is no longer feasible. You have to become a wildcrafter with fishing, wild fruit and berries, mushrooms, roots and herbs, wild meat, (game and non-game), and other sources of supply. I am president of the American Trappers Association, and this is our conclusion from study of the conditions in the wilderness areas, and in marginal lands. You have in Pennsylvania the best trapping in the North, and only Louisiana has a more profitable fur supply.

Thus we recommend that you study each month and find out what will return the most income. Gathering nuts may give a few days living, berries a few days, maple sugar a few days, fishing, turtles, frogs, and other lines each a few hours, or days, weeks of work. There are lines that give a week's prime income—enough to live on and some over. Learn all these lines for your own territory—

"FOX TRAPPING" covers all sets, red and gray—published by Fur—Fish—Game Columbus, Ohio.

The gray fox is afraid of the red fox—and I don't think much of traps set for several different species of animals. If you follow fox tracks for a day or two, just studying where they go, where they eat, sleep, play, etc., stick to one track all day—you'll learn them. Also, keep track of them in summer and autumn months. Then you set for certain foxes and get them.

Mixing scents isn't so good as using, say, anise oil alone for a certain fox at the right kind of place.

A small bag of rock salt in the pit under a trap will help against freezing—clean salt, or salt with a little anise oil on it, a few drops.

Better paint the new traps with a thin coat of metal enamel, and dry thoroughly—and pack in cedar or hemlock or spruce boughs to kill enamel scent. To prevent rusting.

E. J. Dailey, Ogdensburg, N. Y. is a fox-scent maker. Good trapper—snow and open ground.

Anise oil is good scent; female scent is best for rutting season (January-February). But if you find where foxes travel, past a rock, log, etc., no scent but a trap put down without changing is best.

Not many trappers can put a trap in snow and catch red foxes. Gray foxes are not so shy. Catnip is a wildcat scent, not used much for other animals. Anise is good for raccoons, foxes, bear.

I think your best bet is to leave traps and guns at home and work through fox country, learning habits, dens, runways, just what each individual fox does that other foxes don't do. No two foxes are alike—some like cheese, some chicken feathers, both singed. When you know what a fox is going to do you can put a trap where he is going to go.

MAKING a split bamboo rod.

Request:—Would you be so kind as to give me what information you can on the making of split bamboo fishing poles? What type of bamboo is used? Are there any books on the subject that you think would help me? Where can I get supplies?

—John Havens, Paterson, N. J.

Reply by "Ozark Ripley" Thompson:—There is a book published which will help you considerably in fishing rod making. You do not state whether you are interested in fresh water fly and bait casting rods or salt water rods. The book is "Rod Making for Beginners". You can get it from D. Appleton Co., New York City.

The bamboo most in demand is the Tonkin. The butt cuts are best. They are split or sawed out with very fine saws. They used to think that sawing weakened the bamboo, but now the sawed bamboo rods of sections

seem to be just as good as the split, but they all go by the name of split.

Each firm has a secret concerning glueing or of what the glue is made. It is used hot. Then the sections are wrapped with common twine and set aside to cure before they are wrapped or worked up into the finished product.

If you wish further information on the subject please advise. You can these days buy direct from rod makers the glued sections and fit the mountings on yourself and wrap them. This saves lots of grief.

EXPLORING about in Central America—here's advice on the camera and films.

Request:—My quandary is this. Two friends and I are planning a trip into British Honduras and Central America. We plan to be gone about three months, taking pictures all along the way. Will you give us your advice on an outfit for this trip?

Would a 35 mm. camera work here? We have about two hundred dollars set aside for cameras and supplies.

—W. E. Yearman, St. Louis, Mo.

Reply by Mr. Paul L. Anderson:—It is difficult to advise you as to the outfit you need without knowing how much you know of photography, and what you intend to do with your pictures. However, I'll do the best I can.

For tropical use, your camera must be heat-proof, humidity-proof, and insect-proof. There is only one camera available in this country which answers this description, namely, the Zeiss Contax. You can probably pick one up secondhand for around $75 or so, especially since you will not need the fastest lens—F/3.5 will be plenty fast enough. You should have a tripod, since this camera has a focal-plane shutter, and you cannot give exposures longer than 1/50 second with a light, hand-held focal-plane camera. For films, I believe I would advise Eastman Super XX; it is fast, panchromatic, and if properly developed, the negatives can be enlarged ten diameters without perceptible grain. But if you want bigger enlargements than this, then use Eastman Panatomic X. Buy them direct from the Eastman Kodak Company, Rochester, New York, and say that you want 18-exposure rolls for a Contax, factory-packed in sealed tin boxes, for tropical use. Do not open a box until you are all ready to load the film into the camera, then expose it as quickly as possible, and develop it at once; do not try to keep your films till

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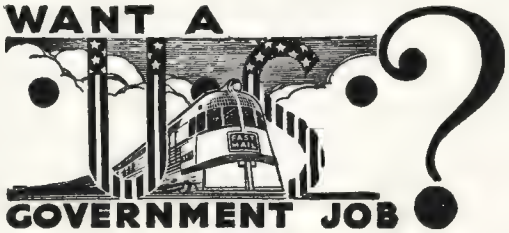

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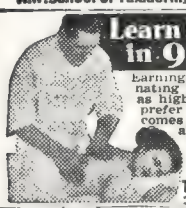

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you get back home, for heat and humidity, in the tropics, will at times ruin a film in as short a space as two or three hours.

Write to the Service Department of the Eastman Kodak Co., tell them what you plan to do (give the fullest possible specifications) and ask for information on tropical development; it is a highly special class of work. You will use a tank, of course; the best are the Albert, Fink-Roselieve, and Nikor, in the order given. And you should have a changing bag, so you can load the film into the tank in daylight—and it isn't a bad plan, either, to use the changing bag when loading the camera, for the tropical light is very penetrating.

You'll want a ray-filter, about a K-2, and use it whenever the light is strong enough to permit; it almost invariably improves the results.

Some kind of exposure meter is needed; but don't spend money for a photo-electric type; they are not one bit more reliable than any other, and are very, very likely to get out of order a thousand miles away from a service department. Use an Expophot, or a Burroughs Wellcome Exposure Table; these are quite as reliable as a Weston or G-E, cost about one-twentieth as much, and don't get out of whack.

Whatever sort you use, remember that all the film manufacturers have speeded up their films (on paper) so give at least double the exposure the meter calls for, every time. Double it again for the filter, and if you are using a fine-grain developer, double it again, unless you use Defender 777, in which case multiply by 4.

If you can afford to do so, use Burroughs Wellcome chemicals; they are very convenient for such a trip, are 100% reliable—and beastly expensive. On page 32 of the Burroughs Wellcome Handbook, you will find some excellent information about tropical development; if you follow that, you should get along all right, but find out what Eastman has to say about it, besides.

Before you start, expose a few rolls in the camera, to get the swing of the instrument, and to learn how to allow for your exposure meter; every exposure meter or table has to be used with judgment—none is foolproof—and you must get acquainted with yours. Then develop these rolls precisely as you will do in the field, so as to learn that technique. It will pay you well to spend a few days and a few dollars in these experiments.

THE Channel Islands off California —watch out if you go pig-hunting.

Request:—Several years ago a chap wrote to you asking information about the Channel Islands off the coast of Santa Barbara. Your reply interested me and now I want to ask some questions about them, too.

Which of the islands are inhabited?

Which have good drinking water?

What about game, timber, etc.?

Can you get a water taxi out to them from the coast?

What is the distance from the coast to Santa Cruz, or Santa Rose?

—R. W. Palmer, Newberry, Calif.

Reply by Frank Winch:—The Channel Islands you mention are more or less inhabited. Good drinking water is available and there is plenty of timber. Game abounds, especially wild pigs. Water taxis are available at any time. Santa Rosa lies to the westward of Santa Cruz Island, the latter is about fifty miles or so from the mainland.

There are two points to be considered, if you have in mind either locating or hunting on the Islands. As far as my information goes, there is no public land to be had on either. I question if there is any for sale through any source. Certainly there is no chance at homesteading. It might be possible to lease a tract from the cattlemen or others dominating these properties. But that I question very much, in view of the world war conditions and the narrowing down of property such as this that might eventually be used as a fortification of some kind.

If it's wild pig hunting you have in mind, give it a second thought. Some years ago, I had an enquiry of this nature and went to some extra work in digging up the facts. A couple of my sportsmen pals had been over and could render first hand information. I passed it along to my letter writer. I advised him not to make the trip alone and not to make it at all if he were not an experienced outdoorsman. From him, I was accorded a generous razzberry. And he went. They brought him back ten days later—minus an arm. Pig hunting is no child's play. These devils are wild and vicious.

I suggest that you write to Californians, Inc., San Francisco. You will receive—gratis —some splendid folders on the subject with all and more detailed information that you desire.

THE Eskimo is a good workman and born mechanic—here's how he builds his kayak.

Request:—Eskimo weapons and tools have intrigued me for a long time, especially from a primitive handicraft angle, and I've read everything about them that I could lay my hands on.

Books and articles have described everything from bone needles to snow knives, sometimes in the minutest detail, but I've yet to read a comprehensive description of the Eskimo kayak.

—Frank Jankowski, Jr.
Poughkeepsie, N. Y.

Reply by Mr. Wilmot De Bell:—I judge from the general tone of your letter that you want a fairly complete discussion of the kayak.

Before going into detail I'd like to make a few general observations. Remember, the Eskimos live in isolated settlements throughout the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions with very little communication and transfer of ideas. Hence, there is considerable variance in the type of kayak favored. Another factor is that, although, before the advent of the white man he was a representative of the stone age, the Eskimo has come in contact, to a widely varying extent, with the white man's tools and materials.

The Eskimo has a natural (or unnatural) flare for everything mechanical and has made use of everything the "Kablunak", as he terms us, made available to him. So the materials that go into the kayak depend on how much contact he has had with said Kablunak (which means, incidentally, "those whose eyebrows meet in the middle").

I hesitate to use Eskimo words because their meaning and accepted spelling vary so. For instance, I was told lost summer by an interpreter that the words for rough and smooth on the Labrador were exactly the reverse of the words used in Baffin Land.

So, having made some explanation of the difficulties involved, I'll endeavor to answer your questions. As far as first-hand knowledge is concerned I can only answer for the Labrador, but on second-hand knowledge I feel I can give you a fair answer, so here goes:

The Eskimos are essentially a coastline race. They all use the kayak. Where the contact with the white man has been considerable, the motor boat has replaced it, partially.

Enclosed are drawings and cross sections of a typical Labrador kayak. Before me, as I write this, are two accurate scale models, one 40-inch model made of wood and seal skin like the real ones, and the other a 6-inch walrus ivory model. Both of them are the best the Eskimos could produce. In general, the kayak, a one man boat, is about sixteen

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'eet long. It is completely enclosed except 'or a cockpit situated about three-fifths of :he distance aft from the bow. It is flat ɔottomed with the rim of the cockpit about ;ix inches above the deck. The frame is wood ınd covered with shaved seal skin. The frame s boxlike with stringers running fore and aft ılong the top and bottom of each side. There is considerable cross bracing and the joints ıre pegged and lashed with seal skin line or leer (caribou) sinew. This allows the frame to "work" somewhat without breaking. The seal skins used to cover it are not tanned. Tanned skins are not waterproof. The scraped and dried skin is shaved to remove the hair, care being taken not to cut the thin black outer layer. These are the true hair seals—not the fur seal of Alaska which is a sea lion. The skins are stretched and sewed over the frame work when wet. The skins are sewed with caribou sinew which makes it watertight. The sinew swells when wet and keeps the needle holes filled. Thread won't do this.

The general shape is long and low, only about a foot deep. The deck is flat or in some cases slightly turtle-backed, with a sharp short upsweep at the stern and a larger more gradual upsweep at the bow. The flat bottom stops about six feet from the bow and from that point it tapers sharply upward to meet the bow line of the deck. The widest point, about 28-inches, is at the cockpit or just behind it. The sides are flat and lean outward somewhat towards the top.

As to water proofing—if the kayak has been thoroughly dried out it may leak somewhat, but after it has been in the water awhile it will tighten up. If it's been in water a long time it gets pretty damp and slimy.

The approximate weight (I'll have to guess at it; I never weighed one) is about forty pounds for the frame and fifty-five for the completed kayak.

They are surprisingly seaworthy in experienced hands. The Eskimos use them in weather I would consider very unsafe for any comparable craft. The kayak has virtually disappeared on the Labrador except the northern part where they are quite common

Its principal use is in seal hunting.

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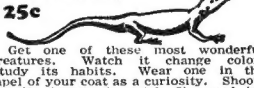

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